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MARY HOLLIS.

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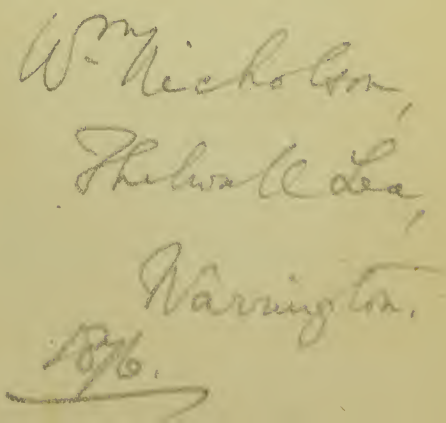

MARY HOLLIS

A Romance

OF

THE DAYS OF CHARLES II & WILLIAM PRINCE OF ORANGE.

BY

H. J. SCHIMMEL,

AUTHOR OF "LADY CARLISLE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, PICCADILLY.

1870.

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BY

H. J. SCHIMMEL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH BY

DR. A. V. W. BIKKERS.

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MARY HOLLIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOOR AT THE HUNT.

"COME over, bitches! come over, dogs!" cried Hugh, long before daybreak, in the royal kennels of Windsor. The chase which was intended to be held that morning in honour of the Prince of Orange, and which was perhaps so much the better to be attended on account of his Highness's intention to be present, seemed to require the whole of the thirty couples in the eyes of the busy huntsman, who is just now calling the pack over, if not for work yet, still, at least for inspection. In spite of the often familiar hints from the enthusiastic sportsman that thirty couples was a paltry pack in comparison with the number of hounds kept by many a country squire, the master of the hounds had never become convinced of the necessity of keeping more than the average number required for a King who seldom hunted more than twice a week.

In as far as quality often makes up for quantity, the pack had nothing to fear from the scrutinizing eye of such a connoisseur as our Hugh. "It was," said he

in his proudest nasal tone, "a glorious pack, combining strength with beauty, and steadiness with high mettle and dash. They were, moreover,"—and nobody knew that better than the experienced huntsman himself, except, perhaps, the first whipper-in—"they were an old-established pack, thoroughly acquainted with each other." The hounds were almost all of them small in size, but experience has taught every sportsman that these are generally the stoutest, soundest, and in every respect the most executive. Yet, however alike in perfectness of shape, however resembling each other in their short backs, their open chests, their straight legs and compact feet, they had often been chosen for their individual peculiarities; one hunted the doubles and short turns, another hunted the drag, and so forth, but every one in the pack was known at the meets of Windsor Forest as a true guider in hard running, or as a patient hunter in a cold scent, not one babbling or over-running; besides this Hugh prided himself upon "their faultless docility." Neither Buckingham, the master, nor Hugh the real executive, would have approved of the plan now advocated by some of our modern sporting gentlemen, of hunting old and young hounds together; the whole pack could therefore at once leave the splendid kennel at the watchword given by the royal huntsman—"Over, bitches! over, dogs!" The sporting craft of those days may not always have consisted of gentlemen, in the modern most worthy acceptation of the word, yet the love of daring, manly sport is so invariably found together with tender feelings for the gentler sex, that our Hugh did not forget even in the kennel to whom the precedence was due. "Over, bitches! over, dogs!"

The pack seemed most anxious for a good day's sport, although they had been too well fed to cause any fear of that cruel chopping which is so often supposed to be a sign of vicious hounds; but the meet had been postponed once or twice on account of the Prince's indisposition. At last the day had been definitely fixed, and the sporting gentlemen mustered stronger than ever on this important occasion, in expectation of meeting the sovereign and his distinguished visitor. All the green-coats and red-coats had assembled at some hundred yards' distance from a small patch of gorse, on the side of a hill, in a very large pasture-field; a little outside the general circle might be seen Lord Middleton, the master in the unavoidable absence of Buckingham, who had not yet sufficiently recovered to attend to his duties; and round the combe of the pasture, at the bottom of the hill, lingered a crowd of London tradesmen with other hangers-on, and urchins almost as much afraid of the whips as the whips and hunters were of them.

His Majesty, who was well known to prefer the gallantries of the Court to the bolder enjoyments of the field, had hardly attended a single meet during the whole of the season—one or two perhaps since the first cub hunt—and therefore it was not to be wondered at that the sportsmen mustered so strongly, now that it had become generally known that his Majesty would satisfy that natural or innate curiosity which, like a halo, seems to surround the head of every high-born personage in the eyes of a vulgar multitude. The chase was to be a general one. Some of the neighbouring country squires had called a meeting previously, and passed an unanimous resolution, not without long

draughts of the national malt beverage, "that the presence of his Majesty at the approaching meet should be looked upon as a great honour and signal favour, conferred upon them by their gracious lord and sovereign." "His Majesty was indeed a father to his people," cried one, slightly affected in his articulation; and many nodding heads added their tacit assent and testimony.

Whether all these and similar outbursts of loyalty and affection would have at all influenced the "father of his people" to leave the charming society of Louise de Quérouaille for a hard day's sport on a cold winter's day—her beaming smiles and clever repartees for the half-idiotic, half-admiring gaze of loungers and shopkeepers—is a point which it is here unnecessary to raise. Suffice it to say, that an intimation from one of the Dutch gentlemen "that his Highness, although regretting that no such sport was to be had in his own country, felt a strong desire to be present at an English fox hunt," had weighed more heavily than any other consideration with the still popular drawing-room King. At first he had raised more than one objection, more objections almost than seemed compatible with the duties of a royal host, or with the deference due to his august nephew and visitor. "The winter was a very severe one. His Highness had barely recovered, and might underrate the dangers and fatigue incurred by the national sport, which often required a two hours' run;" but his Highness, who had often proved himself a match for his uncle in argument, had overruled the whole of his Majesty's objections. "After his illness he seemed to require some out-door exercise; an English winter was nothing compared to what they had at home,

as his Majesty could not have forgotten; his had been a life of fatigue—" The hint of any danger was disregarded with tacit contempt. At last the King consented to be present. He too felt the want of healthy out-door exercise, after having borne so long with the oppressive atmosphere of Mary's closet. Fox-hunting was a sport, surely, which she would not look upon as a silly and sinful amusement; and besides, would not his presence in the field be a source of gratification to many of his loyal subjects?

On the evening preceding the day appointed for the glorious sport, a wide circle of courtiers had assembled to celebrate the propitious event. They all applauded the King's resolution, and looked upon it as the forerunner of better times. Not for the last ten days had there been a meeting of the private gambling club, and the few levees and receptions that were held—how were they held? No more was spoken than was absolutely necessary, and his Majesty returned to his closet as soon as etiquette would permit. The corridors were thronged, no longer with lovely women, but with the secretaries of state, whose faces bore marks of *ennui* and disappointment, for he that used to be the master only in name aspired to be one indeed.

"His Majesty listened patiently to me," thus began Arlington, addressing a few of his intimate friends, "as long as I spoke of issuing circulars to our ambassadors, but when, by his own command, I commenced reading the reports, the King could no longer restrain himself; he started to his feet, but sat down again immediately, and listened to the end. I feel confident that his Majesty might make a better use of his time."

Clifford and Lauderdale shared the opinion of their

colleague. The former had been summoned into the royal presence, and found Shaftesbury closeted with the King, whom he had presented with a long draught bristling with figures, at which Charles Stuart was looking as if they were hieroglyphic types. Nay, his Majesty had condescended to reckon up the debts that had been incurred, had condescended to return to the practice of his early youth, addition, subtraction, &c.

"Indeed, Shaftesbury appeared to be in great favour;" thus concluded Arlington significantly, whilst he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and murmured something of "a whim that was sure to pass."

"The wish is father to the thought," answered pertly enough one of the courtiers. "The evil is more deeply rooted than you think. There is a woman at the bottom of it again."

"So much the better," intimated another, with a smile.

It was thus for various reasons that all concurred in *the* one opinion that the resolution of his Majesty to attend the chase with his nephew was a matter for congratulation.

At last the morning dawned upon the long-expected day, and his Majesty and the Prince of Orange had arranged between them to ride unaccompanied by anybody to the meet in Windsor Forest.

Two magnificent hunters were waiting in the yard at Whitehall, of which any crack rider, any experienced sportsman might well have been proud. The one was a five-year-old mare, who would hardly have been able to go through a good day's work had she not been carefully fed on the hard-meat system; her head, which is the first point to consider in any horse but a hunter,

was not altogether faultless, although it was well enough hung on to make her pleasant to ride, to make her light in hand. That degree of muscularity which is absolutely requisite in a hunter's neck had been greatly promoted by good keep in colthood. In length of shoulder, in strength and muscle of arm, in width and breadth of knees, in what sportsmen call "wiriness" of legs, Stella was hardly equalled by any of the royal stud, and no wonder, for she had been brought out on this occasion to carry the distinguished visitor. She would hardly have done for a heavier rider, and this consideration may have influenced the royal selection of the five-year-old. The King was to ride his favourite horse, which happened to be in his best form. A light head, well put on, with a firm not over-long neck, oblique shoulders, with broad chest, and considerable depth of girth; a lengthy muscular forearm, and an elbow which inclined neither inward nor outward; a short cannon or shank, with large tendons and sinews so as to form a flat leg; an oblique pastern, not too short, and an open circular foot; the back of moderate length, with well-developed loins and deep ribs—such was the noble steed saddled for the King of England.

As his Majesty stepped forward with the Prince of Orange, who had arrived from Cockpit House at an earlier hour than his uncle had wished or expected, the sickly youth could hardly suppress a cry of admiration at the sight of the two splendid animals; he guessed at once that the mare had been selected for himself, and cast a most scrutinizing glance on all her points. True, his Highness did not actually violate the letter of the tenth commandment, but he certainly coveted one of his uncle's hunters, the property of

one of his relatives who was moreover his debtor. He did not lose sight in his reflections of the fact that his hunting days were most likely numbered, for such an animal would have been an acquisition to any stud, and might be applied to almost any reasonable purpose.

As uncle and nephew jumped at last into the saddle, the former looked even paler than the latter; his Majesty's dim and gloomy eyes formed an unmistakeable contrast to the flashing and lively orbs of his nephew. Yet he rode off with his wonted air of courtesy and affability. The proud horse champed the iron-bit, and caused the white flakes to bespatter the capacious chest; he trampled with impatience, and stamped his hoofs on the somewhat hard ground, almost too hard for a proper day's sport. The autumnal foliage had long forsaken the branches of the trees in Windsor Forest, with the exception of the evergreen holly beneath the oaks and elms, and had this morning been replaced, but not compensated, by a thick coat of hoar frost, which surrounded the slumbering winter twigs like a fine network of lace. The grey fog was clearing which had fallen upon the earth during the latter part of the night, and as it vanished, nature, even in her winter garb, assumed a cheerful appearance. Still the loneliness of the landscape, however magnificent to the thoughtful observer of nature, would have inspired the two horsemen, from different causes, with gloomy, melancholy meditations but for the approaching sounds of human voices, of the continual trampling and neighing of horses, and the barking of the royal pack.

A motley crowd of horsemen, headed by the master *ad interim*, descended the declivity of the hill as the two highborn personages approached the place of meet-

ting. The plumes waved from their hats, and sallies of wit and humour flew from their lips. Here Hugh, in the midst of his darlings, had been proudly giving a lecture to some of the Dutch gentlemen, in a phraseology which left them for the most part as wise as they were in the noble sport when they first embarked with their august master. He extolled the virtues of some particular hounds, without hiding the vices of others. Diana was given to "hang" upon the scent; Juno was "so steady on the line," never "skirting;" whilst Viper and Damper were "running riot and mute," although they could hardly yet be reckoned as belonging to "his old established pack." The arrival of the King and the Prince served materially to interfere with the enthusiastic sporting lecturer, for the audience had to meet their master, and the instructor was summoned to the royal presence as well. It would have been difficult to determine whether the disappointment of the one was at all counterbalanced by the relief and delight of the others.

"Bring us a rug, Jack!" cried his Majesty to one of the whippers-in. "Nephew, you are in a bath of perspiration," continued the loving uncle, as he turned towards William of Orange. The Prince would not hear of throwing such a thing as a rug over his shoulders, which would have made him the butt of ridicule, but still the exercise had been rather too much for him; so it seemed, at least, now that they had arrived at the meet.

The Prince and his retinue were received by the English nobility with decided marks of respect and approbation—not a single wicked smile was to be seen on any of those profligate faces; not a single word of

ridicule flowed from those aristocratic lips. His Highness could not be said to have the graceful manners of his Majesty yet, but as he sat firm and upright in the saddle, he seemed to conceal much of that awkwardness which characterised both his figure and gait. The gentlemen of his household were all well mounted, thanks to the courtesy of some of the noble lords, and their horsemanship was in no way inferior to the excellence of their steeds.

How eager was the young man's expectation of a manly sport requiring prudence, courage and self-control! How different from the awkward, peevish boor in the presence of the ladies of the Court, whose beauty he could hardly appreciate, whose wit he seemed to measure by the standard of common sense, and who possessed nothing to inspire him with respect of any kind.

And his Majesty, the King! He too found the clouds on his brow disperse like those on the distant plain. There was to him something restorative in the cold, damp atmosphere, something quickening in the general cheerfulness about him; nay, he began to forget what it was that oppressed him, and he felt more equal to those duties of hospitality which he had undertaken so much against his own will and inclination.

For some time longer, the impatient sportsmen had to remain inactive, and the no less impatient young Prince turned diplomatist once more, while the fox remained unkennelled. Hugh was highly displeased, but he waited and waited,—there was no find.

Whilst the courtiers and country squires were busily engaged in discussing the probable chances of a fine

run, the different good and bad qualities of stag-hounds, foxhounds and harriers, the latest improvements introduced into the science of hunting, his Majesty and his nephew were earnestly intent on a conversation which none could overhear, thanks to the respectful distance at which etiquette kept them from the august pair.

Even before the days of his last indisposition the Prince of Orange had not favoured or troubled his royal uncle with any more formal calls, nor had he in any way betrayed the least notice of the King's changed manner towards himself since his interview with the Duchess of Portsmouth.

During all that time he had received but one visit from Lord Arlington, and on that occasion the latter came to inform him that his Majesty had been graciously pleased to arrange that the first moneys to be disposed of, to the amount of a hundred thousand pounds, should be secured to his Highness. His Majesty had further been pleased to confer upon his nephew the Most Noble Order of the Garter. His Excellency had not failed to enhance the value of this exceptional distinction by the firm assurance that in so doing his Majesty had been influenced by no other motive but that of paying tribute to the extraordinary capacities displayed by his Highness during his visit to Whitehall.

On the part of the Prince all these protestations had been received with a very low bow, whilst he expressed his hope that some of the money might soon be paid to him, at the same time recommending himself to the continued favour and protection of his uncle. "I am entirely at his Majesty's command," added he,

and his words were received by Lord Arlington with a significant nod.

Ever since that time, the Prince of Orange had been overwhelmed with marks of favour and civility. He had been requested to be present at the baptism of the daughter of the Duke of York, the child which the dying Duchess had given to her consort only a few days before. He had been invited to dinner by Lord Arlington, and his Excellency had had the attention to treat him to a diorama of the Church of Haarlem, which at that time excited general admiration, and was much more gratifying to the Prince than any of those trivial masques and farces which would only have sent him to sleep. During his indisposition, when he was strictly confined to his own apartments, his table had been constantly supplied with the choicest fruits and viands. So much was he held to be in his Majesty's favour that several members of the Privy Council demanded audiences of him, whilst the gentlemen of the royal household unanimously concurred in the general high estimation of his Highness's great capacities, although they slily whispered to one another that they could not help thinking they were hidden ones.

This morning again the meeting of the two august relatives had been of a most friendly character, and the conversation in which they were now engaged was a very intimate one from the beginning. The Prince began by expressing his thanks for the great treat which his Majesty afforded him that morning, and the King followed up by assuring him that he felt delighted at having been so happy as to gratify any of his nephew's wishes.

"Now, I must say, you have not any of your habitual bashfulness left: now at least I can understand you," continued his Majesty, as he looked with an air of satisfaction upon the young horseman who was stepping by his side.

"Have you been unwell, uncle?" the Prince suddenly asked.

"No. What makes you think so?"

"I intended to have paid you a visit the day before I fell ill myself, but I was informed that you kept strictly to your private closet, and could not see anybody."

"I had matters of great importance to deal with."

"No bad news, I hope, from Versailles?"

"No."

"I was told that your Majesty was by no means in a happy mood."

"Pray, do not remind me of that. That is over, I am happy to say. I wish *you* would make her acquaintance. She is the strangest child I ever came across. Austere and pious, William, like John Knox, and equally bigoted and tiresome, only more beautiful. Well, you say you don't know much about the sex, but I, who have won my spurs on that field at least, I assure you that she has not her equal. I wonder whether you would like her better than Louise, whom I know you are well pleased with. My good nephew, I almost envy you your last interview with the charming *Française,* although it is owing to her, I believe, that we have learned to know you."

"Yes, she is a clever woman," replied the Prince, drily.

"Surely you do not regret having chatted with her

somewhat freely? I really cannot suppose that you intended acting the cruel one towards her. She is so quick, is she not? although rather fatiguing sometimes, I must confess."

"I did not notice anything of that, uncle."

"Did you ever see a prettier foot?"

"I did not notice that either; all I found out was that she is much thought of at Versailles. Uncle, I have never concealed my intentions from anybody, nor was there any occasion to keep anything from her. Your Majesty must have heard that we discussed the treaty of Dover."

"What—what are you speaking of?" asked the King, abruptly.

"I am referring to the treaty concluded by your Majesty with my aunt, as the representative of the King of France, for dividing the United Provinces."

"Nephew, was that the subject under discussion?" His Majesty changed colour, and cast a most anxious look about him.

"Has not the Duchess told you of our conversation?"

"But who was the first to speak to you about that?"

"She was."

"Impossible!"

"Why, I am surprised she has concealed the fact from you. She informed me at the same time of the advantageous conditions made by your Majesty, although I think it rather strange that France should grant so much greater an army against the Republic than your Majesty."

The King looked at his companion with piercing eyes. Louise had not told him anything of that, and

this she could not have omitted with intent to deceive him, for she herself was under the impression that she had betrayed nothing, since the Prince was already, she supposed, fully informed on the subject. Of course what Charles heard now could not but excite his utmost surprise.

"Well, since you seem to know everything, I am saved the trouble of entering into any explanation, such as it was my intention to offer you before long. I should have done so some time ago, but then you were always so reserved, you seemed to have no ear but for discussing the settlement of our accounts. I think I see now how that was caused: M. van Beuningen was in the way, was he not?"

The Prince nodded assent.

"You will understand that it is in your interest that the treaty be kept a secret for the present," remarked his Majesty, with visible anxiety. "I am sure that you can be trusted, and since you know that your interests have been duly regarded——"

"Yes, uncle; but there is that one clause in the treaty which causes me to fear——"

"What clause?"

"That your Majesty must openly declare yourself a Roman Catholic."

"Who has told you of that?" asked the King, who had now grown visibly pale.

"She——"

"Can it have been her intention to betray me?" said Charles to himself. If she were to raise a storm in the kingdom, who would be the first victim but herself? And if this had ever been her intention, how was it that she had never told anybody but a mere

boy, who moreover was a stranger? At least nobody else seemed aware as yet of the secret. Besides, in injuring him, it could never serve her plan to damage the King of France, and yet this would have been brought about by her frankness with the Hollander, unless he had given convincing proofs of his willingness to serve the good cause.

His Majesty could not yet see his way clear in the mysterious plot, but everything served to show that the Prince had sufficiently convinced the Duchess that he was anxious to promote his own interests. The barrier of mistrust was entirely removed between the uncle and nephew.

"William," said the former, "I do not think that Louis will insist upon that particular point. That is just why I must abide the right time, else the plan will fall to the ground. But in your own interest I must give you some advice. The cause of Protestantism is lost, and I do not regret it. Remember that you need Louis's assistance to serve your end; through him you may see the territory enlarged which is now destined for you. Do leave those Dutch oxen altogether, and do not trouble yourself about any sect. Why should you belong to any of them against your own interests? Power and unity are in Rome. What can the Protestants do, with their everlasting divisions and hair-splittings, that only tend to make us hate a life which after all is not so very wretched?"

"If ever I became convinced of the superiority of the old Church over the doctrines in which I have been brought up, I should not hesitate for a moment——"

"Convinced? Are you waiting for that? You have got too much sense to be so unwise. I promise you my support, my unconditional support, if you go over to Rome."

"I promise you, uncle, that I will think the matter over."

The conversation was here interrupted by the approach of a numerous cavalcade of the gentry of the neighbourhood, who had arrived, partly to share the pleasures of the chase, but in the first place to pay their respects to his Majesty; they did not come quite near the hill for fear that the steam of their horses should in any way interfere with the scent, which even for the closest and most patient of the hounds appeared to be a very cold one.

Charles Stuart suddenly forgot his proselytizing mission, and waved his hat towards those loyal subjects that had come from afar to feel happy in the presence of their Sovereign. As there was no sign given yet that the fox had broken away, the King mixed among the gentry that had come to pay their respects to him, and chatted with them with that perfect ease and affability which, whilst it gained everybody's heart, seemed never to hurt his dignity. What if these affectionate and loyal subjects could have suspected that their King whom they were surrounding with tokens of attachment and respect had sold them to France, had concluded a treaty by virtue of which they would be brought under a foreign yoke, by force of arms if necessary! Would they not have ——? But then they could not possibly know anything of the kind, and perhaps they were the happier for their ignorance. They thought not of politics, and we will endeavour to

follow their example, now that the shrill horns proclaim at last that the fox has broken away.

Hugh had led his many-coloured pack to the copse thick with grass and furze; they had dispersed with the servants in every possible direction; with their tails high in the air, and bosoms forward, they had sniffed along each likely haunt until the fox had sneaked at last from his kennel; fleet as the wind he ran, carrying high his white-tipped brush, and using his subtlest powers to baffle the eager pursuers, who, without a single smack of the whip or even a rate obeyed the experienced whipper-in. The distant notes of the horn had been the prelude of a general outcry, of a holloaing and bellowing such as would have astonished our modern sportsmen, now that such a system of hunting may be safely said to have become more and more unpopular. The riders hurried across the field, over fence and ditch, heedless of bog or steep, reckless in their eager pursuit; and foremost of all—almost too much so—the clumsy Dutch boor who seemed nailed to the saddle of his mare, and whom the King even could not follow on his splendid hunter. The plain resounds with the melodious strains, and the fox seems doomed to death. Not a single earth but what is impregnable, not a cover that could be called safe; yet the hounds keep closely together, and fully justify the praise bestowed upon them by the huntsman. Each loiterer has joined his division, not one is missing in the brilliant pack that is now pressing to the head. There he goes, Reynard, up and down the covers, headed more than once; but at last he seems to have found a shelter for his weary limbs; the sounds of the horn are the sign for a check to the

straggling horsemen that have remained far behind the select few that pressed closely after the Prince of Orange. The latter rode up to the huntsman and ventured to propose a division of the pack. Hugh was not a little surprised that such advice should come from the lips of one whom every one at Court had always looked upon as an inexperienced youth; we dare not say even that he did not feel annoyed by the interference of a stranger, of a foreigner, who was much more likely to know about frog-catching than about foxhunting, but still that stranger was of the blood royal of Stuart, a great favourite apparently with the King, and courted at least by the very men who at one time had sneered at him.

"I have read a good deal about this healthy enjoyment in which I have had but little practice," said the Prince, without the slightest air of patronizing condescension, as he closely watched the twinkling grey eyes of Hugh, who did not know what to answer, nor even what to think. "I have always been of opinion that a fox-hunt must be a kind of war in miniature; I am sure that it calls into action many of the mental powers which can ensure our success in the higher branches of military tactics. What do you say, Hugh?" asked his Highness.

Hugh gave no immediate reply. He had listened to the Prince's words without being able to realize their meaning—the latter clause especially puzzled him—but he had but one idea of his Majesty's nephew, "that he was as nice a young gentleman as you might meet in a summer's day, and as clever as any that ever grew upon the royal stem. Had there been as many foxes on his Highness's estates as he was told

there were nightingales, the young Prince would have made a capital fellow in the field, who would not have minded an additional twenty couples to the kennel."

Hugh's thoughts, as flattering to the guest as they were derogatory to the host, could neither amuse the one nor irritate the latter, because neither heard them.

"I cannot understand," said Hugh, venturing at last to address his Highness in reply, and not a little encouraged by the consciousness of his superior knowledge of the noble craft—"I cannot understand how it is that my hounds have come to a check, and I am doubly sorry for your Highness, who, no doubt, would have got the brush. Stella is a beautiful creature, and your Highness and she seem better friends than I should have expected from so short an acquaintance. However, I am sorry for the check; it will be some time now before we recover; and judging by his bark and mask he must have been one of those large stub-bred foxes that are fast dying out now. I hate your small cowardly French fox."

"You hate him because he is French?"

"Well, no, your Highness! but because he barely runs at the rate of eight miles an hour."

"Which is as much, I suppose, as the fox-hound does?"

"I beg your Highness's pardon. With a good scent—not one as cold as we have this morning, for which I am very sorry for your Highness's sake—the well-bred hound when not over-fed, or not too early brought out, will run at the speed of ten miles an hour. But I hope your Highness will be graciously pleased to pardon my rudeness. I must ride up to his Majesty to inquire whether it be his Majesty's

desire to make for the woodlands. Twenty couples are hardly sufficient though," muttered Hugh, as he rode up to learn the royal command, which he was sure to obey—if it coincided with his own desires or opinion.

Hugh was as good a huntsman as could be found. Although a little beyond the prime of life, yet he was strong, bold, and active, a sportsman at heart, indefatigable in the pursuit of the chase. Add to his physical powers and natural tastes that he was a man of sober habits and of great punctuality, civil and cleanly, a good horseman and a still better groom, and we may be able to explain how it was that he was so great a favourite both with his Majesty the King and with the master of the hounds.

If, looking on the other side of the picture, we say that Hugh was perfectly conscious of his excellent qualities, and that he detested the effeminate enjoyments of the Court as much as he delighted in the manly pursuit of the hunt; if we further draw the inference from this that he valued and respected all men chiefly according to the extent of their sporting propensities and the display of their knowledge of the field, then we may have learned further to account for the extraordinary freedom of speech which the independent huntsman allowed himself before his Sovereign, and for the friendly manner in which he condescended to listen to his Highness the Prince of Orange. To the King he spoke with the prescriptive right of an old and faithful servant, with the patronizing tone of an instructor, and with the bluntness that characterizes the professional sporting man.

Hugh rode up to the King with the whole pack

closely at his horse's heels, and as he cast an admiring glance at his pet hounds, he heeded not the hundred eyes that were upon him, nor the hundred tongues that were ready to canvass all his acts.

After a short conversation between his Majesty, the master, and Hugh, they had come to a conclusion anything but acceptable to the enthusiastic huntsman. As the check had occurred in a cover in the middle of a run, and the fox had been viewed away from it, Hugh had tried his utmost to get his hounds together as well as he could in the short time that was allowed him, with full intent to continue the sport; only his Majesty was already half-disappointed and half-tired; "they had better take some refreshments at the cottage, and try for a good run afterwards."

However Hugh might murmur this time about "unsportsmanlike," and even less flattering epithets, his Majesty was not to be shaken in his resolution.

The conversation between uncle and nephew, which had been interrupted, might perhaps be taken up after the purple Burgundy had warmed the Prince's heart.

"To the cottage, gentlemen!" cried the King to the disappointed and peevish-looking sportsmen; and off they went in a canter.

Hugh and the pack were to meet his Majesty at the next village, whence they were to ride to an extensive wood. Fleet as the wind that freshened their cheeks the whole cavalcade rushed onward. The Prince of Orange, although vexed and disappointed, did not betray any of his feelings; he not seldom joined in the merry laugh and the harmless jokes of the healthy-looking gentlemen, but avoided his Majesty with an assiduity almost verging upon a breach of etiquette.

The King, on the other hand, seemed to feel unusually happy in the midst of his courtiers, who applauded all his *bon-mots,* and outvied each other in their witty repartees. Was it possible that his Majesty was so versed in the art of dissembling, seeing how much had been preying upon his mind only a little while ago? No, that was no dissimulation; that was carelessness, forgetfulness. Charles Stuart had a mind susceptible of all kinds of impressions; at this moment he was under the influence of what happened in the immediate circle around him.

The so-called cottage was scarcely more than a mere shed; it belonged to Lord Slough, and had been built for the express purpose which it was now to serve. It was a booth, divided into two large square apartments, provided with nothing more than the most indispensable furniture. At this time of the year, except on those very rare occasions on which the royal pack were allowed to exchange the kennel for the field, the spot looked desolate and gloomy, with so many leafless trees around it; but in summer-time, when oak and elm had donned their dark-green garb, spreading a pleasant shadow over the snow-white pebble ground in front, then it often proved a favourite retreat of the wearied wanderer, or of the London tradesman's family, or of young loving hearts who here wandered in fairy land. Then the little spot was so quiet and yet so cheerful, so isolated and yet so sociable, as to reflect great credit upon the taste of its present possessor, by whose directions the site had been selected, and the cottage had been built.

On the large hearth burned a good fire, and the two oblong tables groaned under the weight of dishes and

glasses. The hungry hunters helped themselves indiscriminately to large bumpers of wine and tumblers of brandy.

"*A la chasse, comme à la chasse,* gentlemen," cried Lord Slough, whose apt parody of the French proverb elicited roars of laughter from the indulgent guests, who were enjoying his frugal but seasonable hospitality.

"His lordship is better at murdering a good proverb than his Majesty's pack is at killing the fox."

The above sarcastic remark fell—as we might have expected—from the incorrigible royal bastard, the Duke of Monmouth, who prided himself not a little upon his French education, at a time that French manners and French vices reigned supreme at the English Court.

The Prince of Orange, in spite of his delicate frame, showed as healthy an appetite as any of the King's followers, but he touched neither the wine nor the brandy.

"One tumbler, nephew," cried the King; "there's a two-hours' run and the finest brush to you."

"It will soon be almost too late for a two-hours' run," replied the Prince peevishly enough. "Does not your Majesty think that it is time to mount, at least if we intend to find and to kill?"

"He's right for once, the water-sipping Hollander," whispered Monmouth into his neighbour's ear. "If he were to stay much longer here, there would not be a drop left for him to drink; all the water has been used for the brandy."

"Or for the Burgundy," added another of the young nobles, whose aristocratic taste revealed itself more in

hypercritical knowledge of the wine than in due deference to the arrangements of hospitality.

The Prince's hint did not seem to have been lost upon his Majesty this time, for it was soon followed by an order to mount.

Was it indeed from a desire to please his guest? but then the King would never have repaired to the cottage at all. The Prince seemed to need some food to recruit his strength, but he preferred enduring a little privation to being altogether deprived of the pleasures of the chase. Was it that the Prince's wishes, in this respect, coincided with those of his uncle? Or was there another cause for the royal command?

Charles Stuart would not have been the second gentleman in the realm—Buckingham was the first, and, in Louis the Fourteenth's opinion, the only English gentleman he had ever seen—had he not tarried for a few minutes at least with Lord Slough to address a few words of thanks to him for his well-timed liberality. His lordship had thanked his Majesty, in reply, with the assurance "that it would always be a great honour for him to receive his Lord and Sovereign at a place where since the year 1648 he had not been favoured with the visit of his King."

"Has my father ever been here?" asked his Majesty.

"Yes, Sire, when your Majesty's father—blessed be his memory—dwelt here for a while, he was surrounded, not by such a numerous suite of noblemen, but still by an immense crowd of people. Your Majesty will pardon my hinting at these things, but here it was that the royal martyr wrote down his name, and those

characters are sacred mementoes to us." The King followed with his eyes the pointing fore-finger, and found in that direction the signature of his father, and underneath the words: "from my Gethsemane." Charles Stuart grew pale; that name and those words had been written on his father's last journey from Holmby House to London, where he was to lose his head.

The fact of having his attention called to that calamitous death was melancholy, nay ominous. His father had never been so guilty towards his subjects as he knew himself to be at this very hour. What he had forgotten for a moment came suddenly back to him; he turned round, and without speaking another word with Lord Slough: "Mount, gentlemen, mount!" he exclaimed. "We ought now to be able to bear a good run." He took one more long draught of the brandy, and was in the saddle simultaneously with the others.

He rode on in mournful silence; all his wit and humour seemed to have forsaken him. The first comer was to receive the phial of his wrath.

As they joined the pack, Hugh was engaged—for want of better occupation—in feeding the hounds.

"Leave off, man!" cried his Majesty, as soon as the huntsman seemed within reach of the royal lungs, "leave off feeding; Damper and Viper have had more than their fill."

Hugh was perfectly aware of the great responsibility of a huntsman in this respect, and he was entrusted with the breeding as well as with the hunting; the whole kennel department was exclusively in his hands, and he knew that there were various ways of feeding

for different purposes; besides, in coming home his hounds ought to look as fresh as they did in the morning.

"Variety of constitution," answered Hugh, pedantically, "that is the point to be considered. They must all be made equals in strength and wind; and besides, work and weather influence the best of hounds."

"But nobody will call this a severe day," observed his Majesty, in reply to Hugh's sporting lecture.

"No," was the answer, "not unless we start at once."

Hugh proceeded phlegmatically with the work which he had once begun, and for which the King had already rebuked him. He boldly said that he merely did what was his wont to do, and that he did not intend to leave it off this time. Moreover his Majesty knew too little of his hounds to have an opinion on the subject.

"Hugh," said the King, "how ought the pack to be divided?"

"Lord Middleton knows the woodlands here better than I do," was the insolent reply, "however, I am of opinion that the thirty couples are just what we want."

If any one grew impatient, as it became late in the day, it was, after the energetic huntsman, the Prince of Orange. What with quarrelling with Hugh, talking with Lord Slough, and drinking brandy and water, "all of which could have been performed in the saddle," there had been a shameful waste of time. It was evident that the hours were not so valuable to his Majesty, and unless something was to be done they would have to go home without a run at all.

Friendly advice proved better here than the cold scent, and the assistance came this time from a quarter whence it was least expected.

Across the main road, not far from where the royal party had halted, three men on horseback began to attract general attention, as the eye descried their respective forms. The one in front could hardly be mistaken; that was one of the cavaliers of the time of Charles the First; every particle of his costume pointed in that direction. As if he were marching through the enemy's land, so that an ambush was everywhere to be feared, the cavalier in front had drawn his sword, which he brandished occasionally over the heads of his two companions, as if he wished to keep up or remember the exercise. One of his two companions riding behind was a clumsy, stout peasant, whose costume had likewise been familiar to a preceding generation. He was mounted on a strong home-bred horse, if possible more clumsy than he looked himself; he sat as upright in the saddle as if he were a wooden statue, and even people of more experience and less imagination than the Mexican natives might have mistaken horse and man for one single animal. Still, the third attracted more attention than either of the other two. He always remained behind, whatever trouble he gave himself, to ride by the side of the second one. The old red-haired pony was not so anxious as he was; an occasional spur with the heels, or a violent blow on the neck might put the little animal for a moment into a gentle trot, but it never came further than the tail of the second horse. That extremity seemed to be the goal of its ambition. As

far as height was concerned the rider formed a striking contrast to his pony. His legs were so long that they might have easily met under the animal's belly. A large old hat, broad-brimmed and soaked with rain, sometime adorning the head of the cavalier in front, covered almost the greater part of his doleful countenance, but what little remained visible of his face seemed to make a curious impression upon the hunting party. The long nose and wide-opened mouth formed a grotesque appearance in themselves, but the shabby cloak, too short and too much open for the doublet; the sleeves, which were not long enough to cover the wrists, were so much in harmony with the whole face, and the long-haired pony with human appendages, that the gravest spectator would have forgotten for a while the ill-fortunes of the field, and could not have helped laughing.

"By St. George!" cried the King, "if ever I saw anything like it in my three kingdoms! There is a greater rarity for you, gentlemen, than a well-bred fox."

"The pony is not unlike one," remarked Sidney.

"Especially for speed," added Monmouth, who took advantage of his readiness to turn any one's joke but his own into ridicule.

"I wonder whether they have escaped from a museum of antiquities? They are hardly alive," added the young Duke of Grafton.

"Why not from a lunatic asylum?" said another.

"Let us ascertain the facts on the spot," said the King at last; "let us ride up and make the acquaintance of three such specimens of humanity."

They rode up to them in full gallop, and at the sight of such a party on horseback our trio thought they had fallen in with a gang of highwaymen that were rushing from the wood with intent to rob and murder them. As they came nearer, the hunting costumes might have convinced the cavalier, if not the farmer, that their intentions were less ferocious; but the hindermost was of opinion that this consideration should not throw them off their guard. "That might be a blind after all; appearances were often deceitful."

"Let us sell our lives dearly! Chaplain, you in the middle!" cried the cavalier, "or else they'll cut you off. Confound it! is it possible there are so many villains in the neighbourhood of London? What if the King knew about that?"

"Do not be too hasty," cried the one that was riding behind. "Don't let us cry out before we are hurt. It's merely a hunting party; I viewed the mask of a large fox just now, as I told you before. The hounds have come to a check, there is not much scent, and there's not a decent pack in this neighbourhood. I heard the fox bark as we turned away from the copse."

"Bark?" cried the chaplain; "it may have been a mad dog, or a wolf, as people told us."

"Or a whining parson on a pony," cried the cavalier, who felt almost as much annoyed by the chaplain's ridiculous cowardice, as by the tacit rebuke of the second rider.

As the party came nearer, laughing and jesting, the foremost horseman ceased to brandish his sword; his bellicose propensities went down a few degrees, and he began almost to acknowledge to his next companion

that he might be right after all in supposing nothing but the most peaceful intentions.

In a minute's time our trio were in the midst of the jovial party.

"Are you out for a holiday? Where are you going?" asked the King, as seriously as possible. "Oh, what a pity that our Will is not here!" added he, whispering into his neighbour's ear.

"I take it, sir, that nobody has a right to ask me about my movements."

"I mean no offence, my good friend! Are you travelling in a family party?" asked the King, pointing to the two horsemen behind.

The question seemed to annoy the cavalier, nay, to offend him, for he added, in a very loud voice, "The one is our steward, and the other our chaplain; but if you will let us quietly pass on, we shall be very glad."

"That we will, with pleasure. I suppose you are going to London? You are just wanted there. What about your pony, reverend sir? Have you enjoyed your ride?"

"She's got so many ribs!"

This singular ejaculation elicited roars of laughter from the sportsmen, who would not have known how to translate the words into their own peculiar cant, whilst they provoked a sharp rebuke from the cavalier's eye.

One glance, however, at the magnificent pack of hounds that now came round the turning of the road, was sufficient to convince even the most timorous of the three that the party was indeed a harmless one.

"I see, I see, you are out hunting! Confound it! if I had not ridden twenty miles to-day I should not mind joining you."

"For Heaven's sake, no, sir!" groaned the reverend gentleman, who understood the concluding words but too well.

"The reverend gentleman seems to have a holy fear of hunting, which is a pity, for it would give him a good appetite," continued the King. "Besides, he looks so well in the saddle, and with so firm a seat as he seems to have," glancing at the poor man's legs, "he ought to go over ditch and fence and everywhere."

"I wonder how many gates you have cleared to-day," said the other rider, who, until now, had not spoken a word, but had merely taken a view of the party and the strange interlocutor, as if perfectly conscious of his superiority to that class of people.

It is doubtful whether his Majesty would have taken any notice of this impertinent question, had not the cavalier forestalled him.

Being most anxious to get to London, and not for a moment believing that the party were of the right hunting sort—"not a bit like your Yorkshiremen,"—he had not the slightest scruple in bantering with them in his turn.

"As you seem to be out with the hounds, sir, I may as well save you trouble and time by telling you that we have just met Master Reynard as we came down the slope of yonder hill; he seemed a stout runner and not over-fed. I am perfectly sure that if you know only half as well how to hunt as you know how to brag and boast, you won't be long before you

kill. Pray don't break your neck, sir, for the horse is sometimes wiser than the rider."

So saying, and with a swaggering "good-bye," Sir Henry and his travelling companions left the royal hunting party. The latter were not a little taken aback; there was on that man's face an air of freshness, and his frame indicated so much the robustness of a northern country squire, that our soft and effeminate amateur hunters felt as if they had received a rebuke from a superior where they had least expected to meet with one.

The Prince of Orange alone had kept sufficiently at a distance not to hear the undignified conversation between his Majesty and one of his Majesty's common subjects. He seemed absorbed in his thoughts. It was past noon, and he had not seen so much as a mask or a brush ever since they had come to their first check; he almost regretted that he had come out at all.

His Majesty perceived, no doubt, the cloud on his nephew's face, and immediately consulted his huntsman about the track to follow. Hugh obeyed this time the directions of his royal master, and his condescension seemed to be rewarded with the most extraordinary success; Hugh drew two large covers to please his Highness, and they were not long in finding. Fortunately there were here no flocks of sheep nor herds of cattle to prevent the hounds from recovering after a check; the horses ran with the swiftness of the wind behind the eager pack, and after seventy minutes they killed their fox.

"This is the greatest event of the day for me," said Hugh, as he courteously handed the brush to the Prince of Orange. The young nobles, who had never

expected the Prince to be such a bold rider, looked at him with envious eyes, and yet with that generous, manly feeling of admiration which is a tacit homage to superior qualities.

"I will keep the brush in my study at Honselaardyk," said the Prince, with a gracious smile, as he pressed the huntsman's hand. "It will always be to me a pleasing remembrancer of one of the pleasantest days of my life."

The pack were again divided and sent in different directions, and the unerring instinct of the animals was crowned with the most extraordinary success. They had two more runs, one of eighty minutes without a single check, and another of more than two hours without a cast; in both cases they killed. For almost ten days the hounds had not tasted the flesh of a fox. The death was proclaimed in Hugh's loudest notes, and the pack went homewards, looking almost as fresh as they did in the morning. Hugh understood both the kennel and the field department of his arduous profession.

The day was now fast declining, and the fresh country air, combined with the healthy exercise of the chase, had inspired these aristocratic constitutions with an almost plebeian appetite. Never was any proposition of his Majesty received with more genuine satisfaction than that of returning to the Cottage. The party broke into a gentle trot amid cheerful chat and merry laughter, and no end of applause and praise was bestowed upon the young Prince of Orange, the most inexperienced hunter, but the boldest rider in the field; the most delicate in frame, but the most energetic in sport. The bashful and morose youth had become

lively, affable, merry, almost wicked when bantering the gentlemen of his household; whereas his Majesty had become silent and reserved, at times even abrupt. Nor did the most exquisite dishes and choicest wines restore him to his habitual good humour. Evidently something was preying upon his mind.

About four o'clock the sportsmen separated. The country squires dispersed in different directions to their respective seats, with three lusty cheers for their Sovereign. Wherever the royal party met a cluster of farmers on the road, they were received with the same tokens of loyalty and affection; for in the middle of the seventeenth century the fox was still looked upon as a beast of prey, as the invader of the farm and the hencoop.

"Your Majesty is very popular with your subjects," remarked the Prince, after a long and protracted silence.

"Did you ever doubt that, nephew?" replied the King, with unusual peevishness.

"How could I have done so, sire? I never saw your Majesty among your subjects but on this occasion, although I have had another and earlier opportunity of testing your people's loyalty. It was on my first arrival in London. The cheers and shouts on that occasion could not be meant for me, of whom they knew nothing, except as your Majesty's nephew. Don't you think so yourself, uncle?"

"The mob will cheer every gold-laced uniform."

"At all events, if my aunt did not wear such a uniform, the gentlemen of her retinue must have done."

"What do you mean by saying that?"

"If the multitude merely applauds the gold, how

can you explain everything having been so quiet when my aunt was passing through London?"

"Was it, then, so quiet?"

"I am surprised that you should not be aware of that. I was told of it as soon as I had set foot on English soil."

"But what do you mean by all that? Do you value the acclamations of a mob so very highly? But I see, in Holland they have not deafened you with their cheers. Do you really imagine that your reception by the London people was for your own sake?"

"Did I not state as my opinion that it was intended for your Majesty's nephew; that is just why I was the more surprised that your Majesty's sister was not received in a similar manner—by the people, I mean; for the nobility, I am informed, were not backward in paying their tribute of homage. Could it be because my aunt was a Duchess of Orleans, and because the people hate everything that sounds like French?"

"In that case they would also hate me and my surroundings, for in the true sense of the word I come from France as well. When I was an exile on the Continent, I had an opportunity of distinguishing between my friends. The Court of Versailles was generous towards me at that time, and whatever they may say of me, I am not ungrateful," said the King, with unmistakeable signs of vexation. He seemed to divine the words that were hovering on the Prince's lips, but had not yet been spoken; "Versailles," continued the King, bitterly, "did not bargain as the Hague did."

"I had always imagined that the States had given your Majesty ample proofs of their goodwill?"

"Yes, ample proofs indeed! They did just too little to be of any use to me, and just enough to secure my gratitude. They are capital traders, nephew; clever calculators."

"What else could they have done, uncle? They could not afford to break with France, and had to humour England at the same time."

"You are indeed a worthy pupil of M. de Witt; a much better one than I imagined."

"I have read a good deal of history during the last few months, and I have listened attentively to what has been said about Continental affairs; by so doing I have come to understand many things which I never could grasp before. I have learned to see that much was done at the time from fear, rather than from attachment. Your Majesty is pleased to call the States clever calculators; I hope, uncle, they will prove themselves so to the end, although it is difficult to say whether France will turn the scale of their calculations!"

"Nephew, are you afraid of France?" asked the King, surprised.

"I have never concealed that."

His Majesty could hardly suppress a cry of unfeigned amazement. "And you wish to go to Versailles? Do you know what you are about?"

"I do, uncle," replied the Prince of Orange, emphatically. "I should not like to see your Majesty's kingdoms remain the dependencies of his Most Christian Majesty."

"Thank you! But let us ride on. The evening air might have a bad effect upon you."

"Your Majesty must have noticed how France is ex-

tending her territory. The House of Hapsburg has been sinking as the Bourbon dynasty has been rising, and the latter is more dangerous than the former has ever been before. His Most Christian Majesty is threatening Lorraine as well as the Spanish Netherlands, and, through these, the Republic. The only Sovereign able to check the ambitious design is your Majesty. If your Majesty were willing you could effect a good deal. The King of France is perfectly aware of that, which is the reason why he has entered into such a close alliance with your Majesty. I take Louis XIV. to be a very good bargainer."

"Nephew, let us put a stop to our talk on politics. You are too young yet to trouble yourself about such matters. At the hunt you looked far better and talked much more naturally than you do now," replied the King, with a sneer. The two relations rode on in silence. They did not exchange more than a few insignificant words. His Majesty was unwilling, and his Highness unable, to say anything else; since the former had called Ormond and Sidney to ride by his side. The two noblemen never left his Majesty until they had reached the gates of Whitehall, where the nephew took leave of the uncle.

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Had that silent, moping youth deceived him? Had his nephew been playing a game with him, for which the States had dealt the cards? He could hardly believe it, for the gulf between the party now in power in the Republic and the House of Orange was almost impassable. But then the cunning youth must have

played the game on his own account; he that had feigned to side with him was actually his political opponent. How had he been able to fathom a secret known only to a select few, and how could they have betrayed an intrigue in which they were themselves concerned, and the discovery of which might ruin their own future? What had he done to bribe them? The King was by no means complimentary to his own Court in suspecting things of the kind. At the hunt that boy must have shown himself as he really was, and in that case he was no dreamer, no doting child without any vital spark within him. If that youth once got into power he would go far, very far. Was he not now meditating a conflict with France, a power which he, the King, feared himself, and of which he confessed he would like to rid himself—if he possibly could? What that infant told him he had heard from so many of his intelligent and honourable advisers. What was he, indeed? A servant of the proud French monarch, who sometimes treated him with contempt, who had put his own lackeys on a par with him, and bargained and haggled about his subsidies; and yet he, the King by right divine, might lay his weight into the scale and turn it; he might be the first in the alliance of the sovereigns against Louis XIV., if—if he would throw himself into the arms of his Parliament, if he would take counsel with his people, if he would reign in harmony with them!

The King turned about restlessly on his downy couch: sleep would not visit his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

A JOURNEY OF THE PERIOD.

BAD news, very bad news had arrived at Hallam. The Rev. Mr. King, who had been compelled to ride to York through the snow, had not been the bearer of it; on the contrary, the reverend gentleman had had the annoyance of returning deadly tired, and with an empty bag. The news came through Dickens, the ominous bird, as Sir Henry called him, because he always shook his head in a significant manner, and always assigned the worst meaning to any one of Charles's deeds. Dickens had tidings.

After the chaplain had returned, the worthy couple had abandoned themselves to the hope that everything Dickens's clown of a son had written might be exaggerated, if not a tissue of falsehoods. But they were somewhat rudely awakened from their pleasant slumbers by the news which the Hollander conveyed to the Castle five or six days afterwards. The letter which he now showed had been written one day after the other, but it had taken a long time in coming to hand, owing to the crawling pace at which the mail then travelled along the almost impassable roads. It was not from

Charles, but from the Anglo-Dutch clown; yet on this occasion they could not do otherwise than believe it, since every word bore the impress of truth.

Dickens had entered the room unusually pale. He had asked to speak with my lady privately, for his knowledge of the two characters led him to think that anything dreadful that might befal a Digby should first be communicated to Sir Henry's wife. "Iron can stand more than lead," he had said to himself. His plan was, however, entirely overthrown by the presence of Sir Henry. Happily, the chaplain, whom he had once employed to pave the way, was not present on this occasion.

"There's the raven," exclaimed Sir Henry as the Hollander entered the room; but the blithe tone in which these words were spoken soon changed into one of dismay, when the letter was read. "It had come to the worst," thus ran John's jeremiad. "He had seen his young master marched off by a company of the Life-Guards. He had sought for help from Alice, a charming girl," as he again called her, "and she had referred him to Lady Castlemaine. But he would have nothing to do with this woman. She had already got his young master into trouble enough. He had made bold to go and see the Duke of Monmouth, master's best friend, but there he had met with a refusal. It was easy to guess the reason why, for his Grace's steward had whispered into his—John's—ear that his master had cheated at cards. That very morning he had learned that Mary lived in Whitehall with my lady; surely her ladyship could not be so bad as she was described, or else Mary would not stay with her. Through her he might be able to reach my lady.

So he had gone to see her; he had found her the same as before, only she seemed taller. He had asked her whether she had heard of the fatal affray, whereupon she had answered 'yes,' but when he had requested her to intercede for her playmate, she had answered 'No.'"

"No? may God punish her for that!" exclaimed Sir Henry, who was almost beside himself. "That wench, whom I never forbade to roam about with my son——"

"The Lord God is a righteous avenger, sir!" said Dickens, with outward calmness, but inwardly enraged at this unexpected revenge of Mary Hollis. That pure child, too, had been ruined in the great Babylon; he could wish that she might have died. At the end of his long epistle, John intimated that he had no hope left.

"My boy, my poor boy!" cried Sir Henry. "Did I bring him up for that? Did I love him for that? Curses upon Buckingham, for if it is true that Charles played false, he must have learned it from him."

"But it is not true," said my lady, who had all this time sat more upright than ever; she would have seemed a statue of marble, but for the convulsive twitching of her lips. She rose, and went up to her husband; and, as she laid her icy hand upon his shoulder, she looked into his moistened eyes, and said, "Be calm, Henry; do not weep, but act."

"Oh that I could be as calm and cold as you are! Is he not your child as well? Have you not heard, then, that he is in prison, actually in prison? Oh, my boy, my boy! I am ready to fight that blackguard Buckingham. He is the cause of it, and all

those women. Oh, my God! I shall not survive it."

"Friend Dickens, we are grateful to you for your information; your son has behaved well towards our child. I beg you to thank him in our name. Will you be good enough to call Mr. King?"

These words my lady uttered gently, but firmly. When the chaplain entered, she ordered him to keep Sir Henry company, after which she shut herself up in her bedroom.

"What a cold, phlegmatic woman!" cried Sir Henry. And yet how much did he wish that he could be like her! If he could only have seen her in her solitude; if he could have seen her sink down before the portraits of their ancestors; if he could have watched how the muscles of her face trembled, how her gaze was fixed upon one single point; how her deep, inward sorrow could find no relief in tears; how she folded her hands in fervent prayer, "Lord, Lord, my child!"—oh, if he could have observed all that, he would not have called her cold and unfeeling any longer, although she did not give vent to her sorrow quite as loudly as he did. When she came back there was no trace on her countenance of the anguish she had suffered; she made her appearance as calm and grave as ever. All that Sir Henry noticed was that she had thought matters over in her solitude; at least he heard her say—

"Henry, had you not better go to London, and take Dickens and the chaplain with you? They may both be useful to you."

"Yes, Lucy, yes; the day after to-morrow."

"The day after? Why not to-morrow? why not

to-day? Think that he is alone in his prison, and that nobody troubles himself about him."

"I could never have thought that of the King. A Digby has not deserved such treatment at the hands of a Stuart. It's a burning shame, Lucy!"

"I will tell Dickens and the chaplain to hold themselves ready."

"Not King. What's the good of him?"

"He is a faithful old soul, who can render you all manner of little services. Or shall I go with you?"

"You, Lucy, on such a journey? No, my dear! Oh, our boy, our poor boy!" sobbed he, as he clung round his wife's neck; and my lady supported him, cheered him, nay, persuaded him even to start that very day.

Dickens was not surprised at my lady's request, or rather command, to accompany Sir Henry to London —that was what he had expected, and even wished. A few days ago he had received a letter from Mary, stating "that she was lodged in Whitehall, that she had daily interviews with the King, that she spoke with him about the people of God, and that she began more and more to acknowledge the adorable ways of Providence in her own singular career."

Dickens was not at all pleased to find that Mary—whatever confidence he might have in her moral strength—continued to remain at that London Court, where Charles already had been ruined. True, she was stronger than the youth, but even the strongest might prove too feeble. And then those daily visits of the King! He shook his head significantly, and a feeling of nameless grief imperceptibly stole over his mind. One proof that she had already changed for

the worse, was to be found, he thought, in her refusal to help Charles out of his difficulties; but when he learned from her letter the reason of her declining to intercede in his behalf, he was compelled to acknowledge that he had wronged her. "Do you come up here with Sir Henry," she wrote, "and take Charles with you. I have seen so much that causes me anxiety."

The chaplain was not altogether at ease when he heard of the intended journey; however, he dared not refuse, but simply ventured to remark, "that it was late in the day, and that they would be soon surprised by the darkness;" and as Dickens agreed with him in this respect, the expedition was postponed until the morrow.

It was more quiet in the yard than when Charles had left with Mr. George. The servants, silent and gloomy, formed a circle in the vestibule to wish Sir Henry farewell. The latter passed them without seeing any one, whilst my lady conducted him to his horse, and whispered into his ear, "Write how you find matters, and return as soon as you can. It is so expensive up there. Remember that there are fifty guineas in the bag, and keep it properly closed. Try to manage with that. I shall inform Bessie Nugent of some particulars, before she hears them from others, and will invite her to come up here. Speaking has more effect than writing. And now, Henry, let the chaplain take care of you; and be on your guard what ale you drink. God speed—a happy journey!"

She did not allow her sorrowful helpmate to say a word; but hurried away as soon as she had bade him farewell. Sir Henry would have lingered to ask and

to tell her so many things; he called her, he would fain have seen her once more, poor old greybeard, he found it so difficult to part with the woman at whom he always grumbled—in her absence of course—but whom he loved most tenderly for all that.

"She is gone," murmured he, much vexed. "I presume she found it too cold out of doors. As if she were not one lump of ice herself." He noticed the steward among the servants, and beckoned him to approach. "It's for you now to see that all goes right, have everything well locked up, and mind the fire; keep your eyes about you while I am gone; take care of my lady."

Dickens had selected his own horse, and his choice justified his judgment in this respect. The pony had fallen to the chaplain, and he rode between the two when the signal for starting was given at last.

Exercise and the cheering rays of the sun wrought marvels in Sir Henry's mind. His melancholy feelings disappeared, and with them every gloomy foreboding. "Charles was a handsome jovial lad, who had in him much of himself, and who would make his way anyhow; besides, my lady was always so gloomy and anxious, she saw evil in almost anything. We'll make the trip a pleasant one, King; but where's the fellow gone to, Dickens?" asked he, when he suddenly missed the chaplain.

During the first half-hour the reverend gentleman had kept up with them, although he was continually complaining that he could not go so fast; after that he had lagged a few yards behind, and at last had been lost sight of entirely.

"Confounded slow-coach!" exclaimed Sir Henry;

but when he rode a little distance back, as far as the last turning, he saw the chaplain at a distance, standing by the side of the pony. "That's a bad omen, Dickens," cried he to the Hollander, who agreed with him much more than he wished to make it appear. When Sir Henry, however, learned the cause of the chaplain's delay, his good humour at once returned. Mr. King had done his best to keep up with them, and jolting in the saddle, as he did, whenever the pony went off into a canter, he had pressed his knees so tightly that the girth had given way, and the rider had kissed the ground. No one had heard his cry for help. The accident was remedied as well as could be, and the chaplain mounted his pony once more, not however until he had received an assurance that they would ride more slowly, and that the girth should be mended at the next village.

"What was the good of taking him?" murmured Dickens, who, as if he were frozen on his horse, had not spoken a single word until now.

"Why? because I wished it, because I deemed it necessary. You understand, Dickens, because I——"

"That means my lady, sir."

"Insolent rascal, you dare say anything!"

"When it is true, sir, yes, sir," replied Dickens, who now seemed to have transferred part of his Dutch phlegm to Sir Henry, for the latter, who always shunned the cavilling of the Hollander, was silent this time too, and did not speak a single word for a whole minute.

Their tour was amply enlivened with all those little adventures naturally incident to a journey which, what with the bad roads and worse weather, and what with

the chaplain's want of hardiness, lasted some days.

At the very first inn where they alighted Sir Henry could not conceal his anger at the sarcastic smile which their appearance called to the faces of some of the idlers. The landlord, he observed, was too slow in his attendance, and not half submissive enough; their host, however, whilst muttering some of his impudence between his teeth, pretended to put up with the frequently recurring rebukes, and secretly promised himself a thorough revenge. And he *had* his revenge, although Sir Henry did not perceive it until it was too late. They had gone a good way, and had already lost sight of the village church, when Sir Henry suddenly broke the general silence by his usual pet exclamation, "Confound it!"

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Dickens.

"Just reckon along with me. A tough chicken, sixpence; three pounds of dry mutton, ditto; four mugs of bad ale, eightpence; three beds, as hard as bricks, one shilling; two glasses of rum, and a glass of milk, twopence;—*nota bene* the spirits were diluted, as to the milk I cannot judge of it. Well, how much does that come to?"

"That makes two and ten."

"And the swindlers have taken three and ten. Back at once! If they dare rob me, me, Digby of Hallam Castle, one of his Majesty's magistrates, what will they do with obscure travellers?"

"Pray, sir, it is only one shilling, and we have gone so far already," was the discreet remark of the chaplain.

"Only one shilling!" cried Sir Henry. "Only one

shilling. Does he not talk as if he could shake his Majesty's coin from the sleeves of his lanky arms? Only one shilling! That's more than the whole of your wardrobe is worth. But you take the swindler's part; I suppose you have had something behind my back. Out with it, King! What did you order this morning besides your bread and milk?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing," replied the chaplain, laying his hand upon his breast, as if to add to the solemnity of his declaration.

"I believe your word, but then the fellow will give it me back. Right about face!"

"What's done can't be helped, sir! We shall lose more than a shilling if we arrive half a day later, sir!"

It was fortunate that Dickens interfered, for although Sir Henry looked angrily at the Dutchman, he turned his horse notwithstanding. Still, he made up his mind to look sharp in future, and to reckon up his own accounts himself, assisted by "that dry herring," as he called Dickens, "who knew the coins as if he had made them himself."

They now left Oxford behind them, and here began the last day of their journey. During their stay at the old University city, a wag in the tavern where they had put up had managed to frighten Mr. King with a stirring tale of the boldness of a gang of highwaymen who infested the neighbourhood of Oxford even as far as Windsor. Robert King had listened with both his ears, but he had not done so with impunity; before he was aware of it he was overcome with fear, and he shuddered at the idea that they would have to go that way the following morning. He communicated his gloomy forebodings to Dickens, but

the Hollander, evidently tired of the helplessness and childishness of his travelling companion, had curtly answered, "that he too had heard something of the kind, and that it was a very good thing therefore that they had not many valuables about them." Not much quieted, the chaplain took that morning, once more, his elevated seat on the pony, calculating with a sigh that his pilgrimage would last perhaps seven hours more, after which he would call himself blessed to rest his weary limbs within the gates of the modern Babylon.

Sir Henry had been very suspicious ever since he had been robbed of that memorable shilling; but the cheerful sunbeams sparkling upon the dazzling snow-field, had restored him once more to his natural good humour. Dickens himself looked less stern than usual, and the chaplain was already laying to his soul the flattering unction that he and his pony would march into the city without having been for a moment disturbed, when, leaving an immense heath behind them, they came into a hilly and woody country. Here and there peeped a thatched roof from the underwood; they could perceive the smoke of an occasional chimney, or hear the noise of the churn amidst the merry chatting and laughing of the happy country wenches.

"How much everything has changed since I was here last!" exclaimed Sir Henry. "That is now ten years ago, and, upon my soul, it was as barren then as my hand. All the big woods were cut down under Noll's tyranny. But the good God sends His blessing upon the Stuarts and upon the people that are so happy as to submit to their sway. By Jove, this is not bad ground, Dickens, is it, now? The rye looks jolly, old man, does it not?"

"That may be, but there is plenty of snow," replied the old Hollander, as he shook his head significantly.

"That's you all over! Nothing is good except in Hallam, and then only the soil under Mr. Dickens's own feet. We know nothing; we Englishmen are idlers and addlepates; we must learn everything from the cheesemongers across the water."

"I must see the Prince, sir," replied Dickens, and, as if he had not been aware that his words did not refer to what his master had said, until he observed Sir Henry's stupefied air, he added, "the ground is good enough, and the rye would stand better still if they had only ploughed more deeply.... Do you see, sir, he that wants a good harvest must not be afraid to hurt the soil with the ploughshare. It is often the same with us men, sir!"

The squire had so often enjoyed the benefit of the Hollander's lecturing style, that he was perfectly tired of it, and had made up his mind, whenever it might crop up again, to nip it in the bud. On this occasion, however, he was forestalled by the confused noise of several voices proceeding from a dozen country people, mostly women and children, who had gathered together at the distance of a few hundred yards. Sir Henry's question, "What was going on?" was answered by one of the farmers pointing at a she-goat, which was lying there with protruding bowels, and over which the owner, a boy from ten to twelve years old, was shedding a flood of tears.

"How did the animal get treated in that manner?" asked Sir Henry.

"Yes, sir, that's what we all want to know, and we

get the same answer, no doubt, as you will get yourself."

"That it is a wolf," interrupted somebody.

"A wolf?" cried Sir Henry. "What do you talk about wolves? Do you not know that wolves have been stamped out in England as long as six hundred years ago? Did you ever see one?"

"Not I, but Dick Willing, with his red hair; and he says, says he, he's as big as a heifer; and then Ned, that keeps the ferry, you know the coal-scuttle, he's lost his child through the beast; the poor thing was not four years old, and he found it maimed and mangled, much worse, sir, than this dumb brute!"

"Gracious goodness!" was the sudden outbreak, and the sigh that followed the harmless, though earnest, ejaculation, caused every face to turn to the chaplain, who looked the very picture of fear, so much so as to excite the mirth of the spectators.

"Just look at him!" cried one, whose loud voice was heard above all the others; the wag assured the chaplain that an old, reddish, long-haired pony was a delicious morsel for a wolf, which quadruped was especially partial to bristly hair and long ears.

Dickens sympathised with his poor friend, who did not know how and what to answer, and who rendered himself still more ridiculous whenever he made an effort to speak. "Asses are not expensive here, I presume," said the Hollander.

"They are twice as dear as in the country where you come from, you clodhopper!" cried some one in the crowd after Dickens, who had meanwhile begun to spur his horse onward.

"Dickens, there's no talking with those people,"

said Sir Henry. "They are an unruly mob; and that, too, so near his Majesty's abode!"

"We shall see other things yet, sir. The nearer his Majesty, the more uncivil, perhaps! Mr. King, come and ride between us. Zounds! his teeth are chattering. They talked of a wolf, man, only to frighten you."

"Do you really think so? Have you not seen anything?" asked the chaplain of a passer-by, this time overcoming his scruples.

"Seen anything? I should think I had! You are a funny fellow; good morning!"

He did not yet know what to believe, but he felt inclined to trust to Dickens, when, after a couple of hours, they had not yet seen the track of anything. They had climbed with some difficulty the highest hillock in the neighbourhood, whence they had an extensive view, and perceived the spires of Windsor occasionally buried beneath the dark-blue clouds. The road was smooth, and the descent was a rapid one, so that the horses more than once threatened to fall, and the riders looked more or less frightened down the road which they had to go.

"Come along, King! Now for a run down," said Sir Henry, as he took his horse to the slope of the hillock. "I give you a few steps; in front with your pony, King!"

"It is tempting the Lord," cried the poor man, whose pony was brought to the slope by the strong hand of Sir Henry, who took hold of it by the bit. Sir Henry was the starter, and the reverend gentleman and his pony glided down the slope, amidst such droll gestures of the former, that even the phlegmatic Hollander could not keep his countenance.

But these gestures became most eccentric, and suggestive of still greater anxiety, when the unfortunate man had got half-way down the slope; for now, on his left, he heard the underwood crack and shake, and an enormous dog—a dreadful wolf, as he imagined—was about to cross the road, or, as the chaplain thought, to tear him limb from limb. However, the wolf of his imagination stayed for a moment on the road, but seemed to rest perfectly satisfied with the sight of the clerical horseman.

"Help, sir!—fire, Dickens!" cried the chaplain; but there was nothing left to fire at when Sir Henry and the Hollander joined the frightened chaplain at the bottom of the hill.

Here it was that they had fallen in with the hunting party, as narrated in the foregoing chapter.

Nothing less than the glorious sight of the rising metropolis, which had so rapidly extended since the Great Fire, would have restored Mr. King to peace and quietude. He, too, although he had suffered most of all, was beside himself with surprise and admiration.

"Who on earth will be our guide here?" exclaimed the chaplain. "No wonder our Charles has gone astray."

The thought of his son at this moment was painful to Sir Henry. He spurred his horse and cantered away, although waiting for the others as soon as he came to the crowd of the city, in which he would not trust himself alone.

"Where did your boy say we should put up?" asked he of Dickens.

"At the King Charles's Head."

"That's a good house, if it were only for the name. I hope, old man, your boy has not forgotten that I am coming."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, sir! The Duke of Buckingham might sleep there."

"Well, well! that does not prove anything," muttered Sir Henry, as he rode by the Dutchman's side.

After repeated inquiries about the way, and after having continually excited the mirth of the passers-by, they at last reached the tavern, which seemed a palace to Sir Henry, for the house was built entirely of brick, with broad steps, and a double knocker. Yet it was nothing but a second-rate inn, in spite of the three waiters who rushed forward to receive our travellers, and in spite of the carpets underneath the table and in the bedroom which Sir Henry had selected for himself.

The chaplain's mouth opened involuntarily when he smelt in the passage the odour of the roasting meat. His constantly increasing appetite was depicted on his countenance; but Sir Henry tapped him on his shoulders, saying—

"Work first; eat afterwards."

The chaplain's face seemed to answer, "Have we done no work?" but the answer to this question was hardly satisfactory, for Sir Henry put his hat on, and beckoned the two to follow him.

"Where are we going to, sir?" asked Dickens.

"Why, where should we go to but to his Majesty? He will best be able to tell me how matters stand, and with him we can discuss what steps are to be taken in Charles's interest."

"Always supposing that his pardon be granted."

"Why, you stupid clown, do you imagine that his Majesty does not know and esteem the English gentry? The Digbys are not without merits, sir! and whatever

Charles may have lacked in this respect—of which I do not doubt any longer—that will be amply compensated by the services which his father, grandfather——"

"Had you not better go back as far as Adam, sir?"

"On leaving his Majesty, I have a good mind to go directly to Buckingham, and to make peace with him. He was, after all, a jolly fellow, and can't be very much changed."

"He may be buried by this time, and in that case I should tremble for Charles. But hark! there's a familiar step—and that voice! I know it! That's my boy," cried Dickens, anxiously rushing to the passage; he entered immediately, holding his son John by the hand.

"How are you? how is it that you are here?" asked the father; and the son related as fast as he could "that he had been ordered two days ago to leave Whitehall with all his goods and chattels; the young master would soon be dismissed from his regiment, and in that case he would have no business in the palace, which was a downright falsehood, since he had a good deal of business there. However, he had thought best to put up somewhere near this tavern, in order to await Sir Henry's arrival." At this simple tale, Dickens had noticed several times how Sir Henry changed colour. The latter could hardly conceal his anger, and muttered, "It is not Charles Stuart's fault; it is owing to his henchmen."

"And have you seen our Mary of late?" asked Dickens.

"Yes, last night, when I was taking leave. Our Mary? You have no idea what has happened to her; she is the King's best friend."

"Speak the truth, John," exclaimed the father, emphatically.

"I do speak the truth, father. It is as if his Majesty cannot do without her. Oh, so much already is changed! Not a single banquet is given, and the Court goes regularly to the Chapel Royal, where formerly they merely went on grand occasions. The young noblemen curse her, oh, so much! But that's because they do not know, and cannot see her: she is visible to nobody."

"She will yet be ashamed," murmured Dickens, raising his eyes to heaven. "Happy Jacob Hollis!"

"I always thought the wench would come to that. She was always aspiring and proud," said Sir Henry.

"No, that she was not," exclaimed the chaplain, with unmistakable signs of indignation.

The Hollander took Robert King's hand stealthily, and pressed it.

"She sees nobody except me and the King, and then an old hag, who is always sitting by her side. Proud, you say, sir? No, that she is not. Did she not speak to me yesterday just as she always did before? Nothing is changed in her, except that she has grown."

"And would she not speak about Charles when you saw her?"

"She would not answer anything."

Dickens looked before him, and Sir Henry could hardly restrain his wrath.

"Confound it! I should not wish Charles to be delivered in that manner. Is everything, then, topsy-turvy in this world of ours, that a gentleman should be imprisoned and restored to liberty at the request of some pretty little girl? Confound it! I have a good

mind to ask the King about that, and to speak very seriously with him, as I never needed with the blessed martyr—God rest his royal soul! only this one appears——"

"Not to have so much disposition ever to become a martyr," said Dickens. After these words the Hollander sank into silent meditation: only the movements of his lips betrayed that he repeatedly pronounced the name of Mary.

He heard some one whisper the words of Scripture behind him: "Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." It was Robert King who stood there. He had laid his hand upon the Dutchman's shoulder, and looked quite different from the man on the long-haired pony. Nor did his words appear to be without effect; they seemed to dispel Dickens's ill-will; at least he rose, approached his son, and said, "She must go back with us, take me to her directly."

An unexpected and surprising incident prevented him from carrying out his design. A hackney-coach had stopped before the tavern, and from it two persons had alighted—a lady and a gentleman. The latter had inquired after one John Dickens, who, he was told, was somewhere upstairs, after which he had hurried up the steps without taking much notice of his fair companion, who could not so easily follow him. He pushed the door open, and made his appearance on the threshold as—Charles Digby, restored to liberty! Whilst the young man stood petrified at the sight of his father and friends, where he had merely expected to find his valet, Sir Henry seemed to have received wings in the exaltation of his joy.

"Charles, lad! Charles, my boy, you are free again?" exclaimed he, whilst the tears rolled down his cheeks. The father was still clasping his son in his arms, when the lady who had come with Charles in the hackney-coach appeared on the threshold.

"Lady Castlemaine," whispered John, quite amazed, into his father's ear.

Sir Henry was not less surprised by this sudden apparition; he looked from the one to the other.

"Madam, are you not mistaken? You are——"

"With the father of our friend, Charles Digby, of Hallam Castle."

Charles, seeing that a prolonged silence might lead to wrong suppositions, gave her name, and introduced her as the lady who had just been to his prison to bring him the news of his Majesty's pardon, and that he was to keep his commission in the Guards.

"Why, I have heard that name before," said Sir Henry, who knew not yet whether he ought to bow before the lady or not. "Don't you remember it, Dickens?"

"I have the honour to be almost as well known as the Digbys," replied my lady, with a curtsey.

"I can well believe it," cried Sir Henry, tickled by what he took to be flattery.

"A respectable man your father is, Charles!" whispered my lady.

"Too respectable to be ridiculed; I hope," replied he, curtly, "that you will prove by your conduct that you share my opinion."

"And that lady came to your deliverance. Odds, boddikins, my lad, you must be quite a lady's man."

"Father, I do not understand yet, any more than

you do, why the lady did for me what she has done."

"Then it is a surprise? A very agreeable one, at all events."

"A respectable man your father is," whispered my lady.

Charles felt as if he was standing on burning coals. Dickens had repeatedly pulled his master's doublet, but could not get a hearing. At last Sir Henry turned abruptly round, asking, "why he did not speak out loud if he had anything to say."

"All things are not expedient," muttered Dickens.

"Is that one of your servants, Sir Henry? and he too that is napping there?" asked Lady Castlemaine, pointing to the chaplain.

Sir Henry nodded affirmatively, and was about to continue the conversation, when Dickens put his mouth close to his master's ears, and whispered, "that's one of those now that have brought Charles to ruin, sir! Be on your guard, sir! She is a dangerous woman, sir!"

"You may be right, upon my oath! It is very strange, madam, that you seem to take so much interest in my son. No doubt he finds it very pleasant and very friendly, and I should find it pleasant too—" He stopped, for he saw that he had talked nonsense.

"I thank you for your words, Sir Henry of Hallam Castle! Is not that what you are always called? I knew that no one had more right than myself to inform your son of his discharge."

"You mean to say, madam, no one had more right? Upon my soul, I should like to know who or what gave you such a right, madam?"

"Why, our friendship!" She turned round to

Charles, who was choking with suppressed annoyance. "A most amiable and respectable man your father is, Charles! I will not be any longer in your way, you may freely give vent to your feelings of joy and surprise. Your old apartments in Whitehall are at your disposal again; only," added she, in a whisper, "I should not advise you to keep your father and these two mediæval guys with you. The Court air might become dangerous to such honest souls. Ha, ha, ha! Farewell, Sir Henry of Hallam Castle!"

She curtsied repeatedly to the old baronet, who really did not know what was happening to him, and returned every one of her bows with a slight acknowledgment.

"That's a queer woman!" said Sir Henry, who for all that could not help liking the look of Lady Castlemaine.

"Never mind her, father! She is a dangerous person, one who is not worth——"

"Hallo, young man! And that is the woman who has delivered you, and you were always with her until you met with the other? I begin to see through it now. What a good thing that Bessy Nugent is far away. Well! let that be now; your mother sends her compliments; she will lecture you on the subject, and she will advise you to rush head over heels to the altar-steps. What anxiety has your mother not suffered on your account! 'Charles was in prison!' 'Charles had killed the Duke of Buckingham'—a great scoundrel, by the bye! 'Charles had played false!' Charles, my lad, if the latter had been true I should never have seen you again, and the Digbys would have died out, for, upon my solemn oath, I should not have acknowledged

you as my son, no more would your mother. At all events you seem to have known no hunger and but little grief in your prison. You are looking capitally. Well, I never thought that you would be so badly off, I felt sure that his Majesty would not so easily forget our services."

"Our services, father!" exclaimed Charles, with a painful smile. "Do not expect anything from the King."

"We'll just see about that, my boy, although I do not mean to pitch my tent here for long."

"That's quite right, father. I feel sure you would not like things here."

"That is to say——! Ten years ago I had nobody to guide me, but now I have got a boy who must know the way pretty well. When do you think you can be ready?"

"I? what for?"

"To go back with me. I have been obliged to promise your mother that. You have seen enough of London now, and can't get anything out of his Majesty anyhow. You know what Bessie Nugent is to bring you; and if you do not make haste about the match, certain confounded rumours may reach her ears, and I should like to hear her called Mrs. Digby, and to see a few acres added to your patrimony. Zounds! you have not lived as a hermit here, and I am not quite sure what you would do if you were to be left to yourself again. To make a long matter short, you must go back with me."

"Impossible, father! Have you not heard, then, that I am restored to my rank and honour? And now you wish me to leave London, with a brilliant career before me!"

"Your brilliant career lies in Hallam, with Bessie."

"Father, I am no longer a child, and I do not allow myself to be given away as if I were a sheep. Even if that young lady were as pretty as she is plain, as gentle and amiable as she is cross and sulky; even if she brought me a seat like Hatfield Manor instead of a kitchen-garden, I would most cordially leave her alone for all that. I have no desire to marry, not for the present, at all events."

"We'll see about that!" replied the old man, with increasing anger. "We'll just see about that! Do you imagine that you are the master, because you have been out of my sight for a couple of months, which time you have spent in revelling and drinking, in smoking and gambling, so that it is a burning shame! Do not make me harsh and reproachful."

"But who on earth told you to come up here? Who has painted everything so black to you, and whoever put it into your head that you could have saved me had there been any real danger?"

"I am here, and that's enough. There's a father's reward, now! You are several days in the saddle, you fight your way across the snow, and all that to be asked at the end of your journey, what's your business in town? That's confounded hard, I must say. Young scamp, you shall go, do you hear? you shall go back with me."

The paternal complaints had made more impression upon Charles than he was willing to show, and this prevented his resisting any further for the present; yet he had made up his mind to put an end, as soon as convenient, to the old man's highly unseasonable visit.

Dickens had gone out with his son to see Mary, and King was napping, so that father and son had a nice time of it together. Now only did the former learn the real state of affairs, so far at least as the latter felt inclined to inform him. Charles related the true origin of the duel, but he was silent as to his debt to Buckingham; he did not mention anything about the fair unknown, to whom he ascribed his deliverance, although it was Lady Castlemaine who had fetched him, and in spite of her unvarnished hint that all was owing to her. "She, as Buckingham's relative, ought to have been against him, but she only wished to make him her *protégé* more than ever; and as soon as his Majesty's anger was subdued, she had embraced the first opportunity of speaking in his behalf, to have him restored to royal favour."

Afterwards, when Sir Henry heard of all the parties at which his son had been present, and of the club where he had so many friends, the old man tapped his son on his shoulder, in the best of humours, and cried, "you must show me all that by-and-bye, my boy; and then when I have seen his Majesty, I will go back, that is to say, we shall go together. How ever could I allow myself to be frightened by that old woman, Dickens! The lad has behaved like a brick!"

These words concluded Sir Henry's evening reflections on the night of his arrival in London.

Charles felt less comfortable on his downy couch, which to him seemed as hard as a plank. Why had Sir Henry come just now? now that he so much wanted to be unfettered in his movements, to see her for whom he was dying, and to avoid those who had

forsaken him in the hour of danger. For bitter were those hours of solitude that now recurred to his memory, in which he asked himself where they all were that had sworn everlasting friendship to him; when he asked himself what were the honours and glory that could vanish in a few minutes, and what was the value of all those hypocritical protestations of attachment, of all those illicit enjoyments, which left the heart so cold and so empty. One only—thought he—could afford ample compensation for all he had lost—for all he had willingly renounced.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE CHANGES.

MARY was still living in the small but tasteful apartment which had been assigned to her by my lady's favour. As far as appearances went, nothing at all had changed, but that was all. There might be no outward modification, but in every other respect the changes were very great indeed. In the beginning my lady had called her childlike and innocent, attractive and artless, and such qualities were not calculated to interest her for any considerable period of time. A more close acquaintance with this young maiden had enabled her ladyship to discover many other qualities which had even taken away her interest altogether. There was no trace left of her innocence or artlessness, but abundant signs remained of spiritual pride, of consciousness of power, and of a display of self-reliance, which had at first annoyed my lady, then hurt her, and at last actually frightened her.

She had reserved for that child, whom she had saved from utter ruin, the felicity of obliging her patroness, and Mary had dared boldly to refuse, and to say that she could not yet co-operate in her friend's deliverance. Since that time my lady had been once more to see her, but her visit had been a short one;

as every word the maiden spoke seemed calculated to wound her. Oh! if the instrument which she had chosen should prove to be useless, how soon would she break it and cast it away! But for the present she was obliged to have patience; she could not destroy the work which Mary Hollis was doing for her. Was not Madame Carwell already defeated? The King did not visit her any longer; instead of Charles Stuart, she had the French Ambassador to keep her company. The cabinet ministers, instead of visiting the Duchess of Portsmouth, did not set foot in her apartments, but went out in the morning to work with the King. "She, Lady Castlemaine, would so have liked to see that! She would have looked on it as such a laughable scene, Charles Stuart beating his wings in the stagnant pool of politics!"

It must have been with the greatest antipathy that Charles Stuart had undertaken a labour of this kind; it must have cost him a very severe struggle, but this proved the more clearly the mighty influence of her who had persuaded him to do so. For a moment Lady Castlemaine asked herself "whether such influence might not become too powerful for her, who, after all, had introduced this child to the King;" but then she desired no affection on his part; she merely wished for power from him, and if once she could sit in the place which she was gradually approaching, if once she were delivered from the intrigues of her foreign rival, then she would have reached the great end of her ambition.

Mary had changed more than Lady Castlemaine, more than any one at Court could have expected. Did she don magnificent dresses; did she drive about

in the royal coaches; did she hold receptions and levees? Far from it. The Court submitted to her influence without knowing her; she was, and remained invisible, shunning all display. But it was within her that a great change, or rather development, had taken place. The simple country child had been placed, with her gospel, in the midst of a world which she did not know, which she could not understand. She had partly learnt to know it by suffering and combating in that world herself, but much yet remained at the Court of England for her to learn, that she might be a powerful instrument in the hand of God. Charles Stuart, the man, could not be brought to a lasting conversion of any kind, as long as she could not speak with the King and point out his duties to him. And that part too of her education got to be accomplished, not by chance, but by a necessary concurrence of circumstances.

His Majesty's new favourite—for as such she was regarded, in the same manner as all the others who sought to be anything more than mere butterflies that charm by their splendid colours only for a moment—must try to influence the government of the country. Only the influence of the obscure girl was different from that exercised by Madame Carwell or Lady Castlemaine. The National Party, which was soon to assume a definite shape under the name of Whigs, built all their hope on the influence of the new favourite, whose efforts inspired them with confidence, and whose help and guidance might produce a radical change in the policy of the United Kingdom. To this it may be ascribed that Lord Shaftesbury went to see Mary Hollis. The high-placed statesman bowed before that

humble child, but he was less disappointed than surprised when he made the discovery that she had not the slightest knowledge of politics. As soon as he entered into matters of that kind, he was answered that "she had to think of other things, which were not of this world;" but when he had once, through all her strange formulas, pierced to her most inward wishes and aspirations, when once he had identified her expectations with those of his party, then he did not any longer regret the trouble he had taken in convincing her of the intimate connexion between the King and the man, in persuading her that God had not only chosen her to save the man Charles Stuart from destruction, but much more to save the King, and, through him, his moaning and bewailing people. From this visit Mary learned certain things of which she had never heard before; she astonished the statesman by the quickness of her discernment and deductions, whilst the strange tinges which they assumed through her notions of God and the world, almost brought a smile on his lips. She might not have been able to follow all the calculations of the English politician and party man, but she fully understood him when he painted the pernicious influence of Louise de Quérouaille and of Lady Castlemaine. When left to herself she pondered over all she had heard; she endeavoured to survey the whole, and to assign to each particular a place in the system which she had traced for herself. Shameless women governed the "anointed of the Lord," and made him a laughing-stock and a tool of the Philistines. That was a turning of the institutions of Jehovah! The woman, given unto man as a helpmeet, might exercise her influence through the power of

love, without raising herself above her lord. But here the woman was suffering; here she was humbled by others, by Delilahs. Mary prayed God for strength to raise herself to the height of her calling, that she might "take the fan in her hand, gather the wheat into the garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!" Whoever could have seen her in that moment would have observed on her face, so suggestive of the noblest purity, a strength and determination which caused a painful impression by the side of the womanly appearance of the lovely and pure maiden!

It was shortly after Lord Shaftesbury's visit that John informed her of what he had written to Hallam Castle by her own advice. She had no doubt that Sir Henry would not be long in starting. She calculated in how many days the journey could be made, and it was by that time she had asked for Charles's discharge.

Amiable inconsistency of a character generally so consistent! She had always maintained that there was no virtue without struggle; she had argued with my lady the efficacy of a seclusion from the world, since sin proceeded from the heart, and not from the world; but she dared not apply her tenets to Charles.

Seemingly cruel and ungrateful, she would not shorten the time of his imprisonment; but that which seemed cruelty in her, was the great anxiety of friendship to keep him out of temptation until Sir Henry had arrived with his companions to receive him and to take him back. My lady had learned from the King's own mouth what Mary had asked him, and what condition she had coupled with it, namely, not to discharge him before Sir Henry's arrival. My lady

had taken care to inform his Majesty of the event immediately after the baronet's completion of his journey, and she at the same time had asked the King whether it would not be an agreeable surprise for Mary to do that which she had not asked, which she would not have asked, to restore Mr. Digby to his former position. Buckingham was out of danger; the wrong which he had suffered was some days old by this time, and his Majesty yielded.

Young Digby's pardon was whispered round as the most important news of the day, but few could yet resolve to renounce the neutrality which they had kept up during all the impending affair. Harry, bold as he was in the presence of his Majesty, Sidney, and many others who called themselves Charles's friends, had too much feared the influence and *prestige* of Buckingham to commit themselves for a Digby. True, the King's pardon had been obtained, but that did not include his Grace's, and until his recovery, it would be better to wait, and not to aggravate "Mad Will," who seemed to be too clever by half for death; Satan had had his hands upon him, and actually let him slip again.

The news of Charles's deliverance seemed not to have reached everybody; not the unknown lady at least, who is so discreetly rapping at Mary's door. Or did she not belong to the Court?

Mary was all alone; old Kate had left her, and this opportunity had been watched for by a young girl, who had hurried away along the gallery as soon as the maid had disappeared.

"Can you speak to me for a moment, my lady?" asked the stranger, gently, as she turned the key.

"The title by which you address me, is one to which I have no right," answered Mary, rather hesitatingly. "May I know who it is that honours me with a visit, and to what I am indebted for it?"

"You cannot think it strange that any one should wait upon you, upon you that are so powerful——"

A crimson blush came over Mary's face. Another expressed the conjecture which she had entertained for some time, but which she had always endeavoured to suppress. A brilliant disgrace! That was her part in the eyes of the world. She lived retired from everybody, so that she could not be made aware of her opprobrious reputation, but this woman had come to let her know. Who was she that came here to insult her? A supplicant, that was evident; for there she stood, in humble attitude, with downcast eyes, speaking so gently, nay, almost inaudibly, words that were uttered with the greatest difficulty; there could be no doubt about it, she that stood before her was in trouble, and expected help from her.

Mary offered her a seat, and began by asking, "Who made you believe that I have so much influence?"

"So much influence? All London knows that, and all England will soon learn that the sceptre has passed from the Duchess of Portsmouth to you."

It was now Mary's turn to cast down her eyes. Was the strange lady conscious of the humiliation which her words conveyed to Mary's mind? She saw in her the successor of the Duchess of Portsmouth, of Lady Castlemaine. Unless she meant to wound the young girl's feelings, she was cringing to her power and influence.

"If people are in want of anything new, they generally seek and find it in the streets. It is often so gratifying to our own selves to make our neighbours feel small, is it not so?" asked Mary.

"Oh, no! oh, no!" replied the other, hastily. "I really did not mean to offend you. How could I, since I have myself so much need of indulgence?"

"And is that the only reason why you should dread it? My lady, if you do believe in my power, and have really come hither to claim its support, I must confess that your words are very ill chosen." She looked her visitor proudly in the face, in full consciousness of her innocence, or perhaps of her power.

"How shall I select my words so as not to wound you who are so susceptible?" cried the unknown lady. "I have been informed that you are virtuous and noble-minded, as well as beautiful. Now that I can judge of the last, I should so wish to be convinced of your possession of the other qualities. Yes, I have no doubt you are a pure, chaste, and noble maiden."

"Pray, my lady, say no more. I understand what makes you speak in that tone, and therefore your words are the more painful to me. Not by such flattery—which I call the idle words of the heathen—should any one attempt to approach me. Yes, through the mercy of God, I do possess some influence, and if your wishes are reasonable, and if your cause is a good one, you may reckon on my utmost efforts."

However encouraging these words were, the other still remained silent; she seemed to have still greater difficulty in preferring the petition that was hovering on her lips. She had heard something of the young girl's eccentricities, but the reality surpassed the

rumour. Although Mary's last words ought to have encouraged her to speak out, they seemed, on the contrary, to make her more reluctant and wavering.

"If your wish is not a reasonable one, let me not hear it," continued Mary.

"It is certainly not an unreasonable one. Every woman, I think, will say so. You differ from others, but in this respect you must be a woman like all other women; you must know what passion is, and how it can rage within us—how it can occupy our whole soul, and make us forget the things of this world. Oh, surely that cannot be sinful before the tribunal of God."

"Do not defend yourself, my lady; nobody has yet accused you," remarked Mary, evidently moved.

"I trust in you; you are the only one to whom I dare open my heart."

"And that without knowing me. No, I may not accept so much confidence."

"But when I offer it myself? When I come to you of my own accord, and say you are the only one that can comfort, that can help me?"

"Then you grant me your confidence because you cannot help yourself. Be sincere and frank, my lady, and wipe away the last false hue which decks so many faces, alas! at this Court. Speak, I am listening."

"Will you promise me to keep it a secret, and never to hint at it before anybody?"

"If it is nothing against the voice of my conscience, I will."

"Conscience!—but that is so evasive."

"Conscience is the severest judge; is it not the voice of God within us? What was it, my lady, that

made you just now your own accuser, if it was not your conscience?"

The unknown lady trembled. Was it a prophetess that stood before her, a saint that could work miracles, and knew what was going on in the human heart? How humbled did she feel before that young girl, the lady who, in spite of her suppliant demeanour, had looked down upon Mary when she first entered the room.

"If it is not, then, against the voice of your conscience,—and that it will not be,—could your conscience ever demand a sister's death? That would be the consequence if my secret were discovered or betrayed."

"I do not wish to hear it, my lady," cried Mary, shuddering. "I should not like to be in such a dilemma."

"But you must know it in order to help me, and your assistance is necessary. No, no, you do not fathom the passion of love; you bear the features of a saint, and have peace and quietude within."

"Sin hath passed upon all men, my lady, and death by sin. How, then, can you speak of saints, born of women, and all subject to death?" She spoke these words emphatically, and was about to proceed, when her visitor interrupted her by the solemn declaration:

"That she had never intended to assail her conviction; that she quite submitted herself to Mary's condition, but wished to add one request to it, to grant which could not be against her conscience in any way. "I live at this Court, but I cannot tell you my name. No doubt you will some day meet me. Oh, do not then mention to any one that the supplicant

who now stands before you is the same as the woman you will then see."

"But of what crime do you accuse yourself, then?" asked Mary, actually frightened by all these preliminaries, and dreading that she should get mixed up herself with things that she ought to condemn.

"Mine may be a crime before your tribunal, but it would not be found so before any other. Do not take these words as implying that I believe you to be cold and cruel. But I am foolish! During the greater part of my life I have been deceived, insulted, and despised. I have learned to fear, to distrust, and to shun mankind. The most harmless of my actions have been construed as crimes, and so it is that I have learned to fear everybody and everything, and therefore, perhaps, the temptation has been strong to me. I trust in you; I need no promise; you will act as your heart bids you. I love a young gentleman who has fallen into disgrace with the King. You see that I am frank; I might have pretended that a feeling of mere friendship, or a natural desire to do good, had led me hither, to entreat you to speak in his favour; but you asked me to be frank, and so I will be."

"And who is that gentleman?" asked Mary, whose breath seemed suddenly stopped.

"Ensign Digby!"

This name, as it fell upon Mary's ears, roused at once the most pleasant reminiscences and the most unspeakable grief. The name of her playmate thus pronounced by a strange woman! It was to her as if no one had a right to pronounce it but herself. "Ensign Digby!" She had never called him anything but Charles. Her own passion so scrupulously

concealed within her own heart, and the stranger's feelings so suddenly revealed. Was that frankness? No, it was shamelessness.

Her features probably betrayed something of her inward struggle, for the unknown visitor asked with more anxiety than sympathy, "What is the matter with you? Do you know the gentleman?"

Mary was quite unable to reply, and so she answered with a counter-question, "What do you wish me to do for him?"

"Cause him to be restored to liberty, if only for my sake. He is not guilty. Buckingham has wronged him."

"I knew that, I knew that!" cried Mary, excited, and making a sign with her hand for the stranger not to proceed. There was a moment's silence, but that moment Mary needed to survey the chaos within her, and to combat the devil that tempted her. "I am happy for your sake, my lady, to be able to inform you that he——the young officer whom you refer to, is at liberty already. The King has granted my request."

"Many thanks, many thanks!" shouted the lady. "But, pray, who induced you to ask for Mr. Digby's pardon? Who was it that took so much interest in him?"

"Lady Castlemaine," was the cold reply. Mary, Mary, was it not as if a feeling of bliss came over you as you uttered these words, which were quite as much calculated to wound that woman, as her words had unwittingly hurt your own feelings? Mary, did you hear, on this occasion, the voice of Scripture crying unto you, "Crucify the flesh?" Mary, you would be

an instrument in God's hand to save a kingdom from ruin, and yet you are nothing more than a weak, weak woman!

"Lady Castlemaine!" repeated the other. "And why did she ask for Mr. Digby's pardon, since she could have prevented his imprisonment? You, Mary, that are so good and kind, so noble-minded and so powerful, cannot you command that woman not to entice the young man any more? Lady Castlemaine passed indeed for your patroness, but surely she is so no longer? You have learnt to despise a creature who ruins everybody with her embraces? You despise her, do you not?"

"Can *you* do so, who, awhile ago, stood so much in need of excuse for the violence of your own love?" asked Mary, and her voice seemed to be stifled by her suppressed tears. The lady cast down her eyes, and was silent, for there was overwhelming truth in those words, more even than Mary suspected. The latter, upon second thoughts, did not seem to think that the comparison was a fair one, and so she added: "I feel sure that I am unreasonable; the passion of Lady Castlemaine, if still existing, is, no doubt, different from yours. I am sure that your love is not a guilty one."

"What do you mean by these words?" asked the other.

"You came to me with so much anxiety, and so mysteriously. You begged me so earnestly to be discreet—— My lady, that young gentleman, who is so much younger than you appear to be, do you really love him with all the strength of your soul; do you love him as it was God's will that woman should love

man, with all your heart, with all your strength, not from any selfish motive, but even unto the greatest self-denial?"

"Mary! these words——! You know the young man?"

"Why so?"

"You know him, because you know that he is young, younger even than I am. Why did you conceal it from me? Why so indifferent at first, and so excited now?"

"I know him, and shall be glad to see him happy," said Mary, making almost incredible efforts to restrain herself, and to appear calm. "I am a fanatic, am I not? and imagine a heaven which I shall never reach. I hope you will be able to make him happy——but why should you not if he loves you as you love him? Only, what was it that caused you so much anxiety at first? Surely the avowal of a pure and holy affection cannot weigh so heavily on the mind of a sister friend. Love, pure, holy, and returned, has no need of concealment. Yet that is what you sought, is it not? You are the same, I presume, who took so much trouble to remain unknown at the ball of the Duke of Buckingham; the same who tied that ribbon round my wrist, so that the suspicion might fall upon me? Pray why did you do all that? What reason may you have thus to conceal yourself?"

In spite of all her efforts, Mary had allowed herself to be governed by her passion, but the strange lady fortunately did not perceive it; Mary's questions had so confused her, that she dared no longer raise her eyes before the stern gaze that was fixed upon her.

"I have already confessed to you, that all that

has surrounded me for some years past has inspired me with a fear, which I am unable to overcome. I have gradually learned to suppress every emotion, because it was spied and wrongly interpreted. I mistrust everybody; I mistrusted even his love, and therefore I always met him in disguise, as I was not sure of his affection. Oh, I am deeply to be pitied!"

"To be pitied? and you believe yourself loved in return!" exclaimed Mary. "Surely it is only an unjust diffidence that has kept you hitherto from an open confession? The very mysteriousness with which you set to work will bring about what you wish to prevent. Why not overtly engage yourself? Why not?" asked she once more, when her question met with no reply.

"Because——because——I am placed so much above him——because my friends would oppose it."

"That, then, is your love? Do you not see then that you trifle with his happiness? You meet together, and pledge your troth; you demand reciprocal vows from him, and do not venture openly to confess him! You love him, and dare not stoop down to his level; you profess to love him, and you never ask yourself what you cause him to suffer! That is no love, no pure and sacred love!"

"You do not know the world; you called yourself a fanatic, and so you are indeed!" replied the other, with ever increasing earnestness. "Oh, if you wished, how happy could you make him and me! Your apartments are a sanctuary in which no one dares set foot. Let them be the sanctuary of our love!"

"How could I be the abettor of a discreditable act?

Should I facilitate the concealing and disguising of your feelings? Should I receive you both here? Your proposal makes me shudder. If you really do love him, come with me. For your sake and for my own I will set foot upon ground which I never yet trod in my life—the apartments of the King. I will ask his Majesty to grant him a title that will raise him to your own position. He will be of equal rank with you. Come with me!"

"Dreadful child," sobbed the other, covering her face with her hands. "No, that I could not do. I have delivered myself into your hands! Pardon my words! You are a worthy Christian woman, just like my—— But that I could not do yet."

"Then I do not believe in your love," exclaimed Mary, almost triumphantly. "It is a mere whim, of which so many have been the victims at this Court. ——In that case it is my duty to warn the young man whom you deceive, and to persuade him that the friendship of Lady Castlemaine is less criminal and dishonouring than yours."

"Do not tell him, pray! for God's sake, do not! Oh, my God, my God! let me rather die! Mary, you dwell more in heaven with the angelic host than among the people of this earth; you do not know what love is; no, you do not."

Mary grew deadly pale. "I do not know?" asked she, mechanically. "Go, my lady! Your secret will be kept sacred! I will believe that you *imagine* you love him; my conception of the people of the great world may be erroneous, nor can I exactly judge while you do not tell me all, and conceal the reality from me. Only, I entreat you, my lady, spare him!"

"That word is a cruel one, and if I understand it thoroughly——! Mary, you know the young man, you have known him a long time. You seem to feel for him so intensely. Mary, you love him, and you wish to take him away from me; you love him, and that is why you speak so feelingly of self-denial!"

"It was my wish to join you together, my lady! I desire his happiness and your own. I have even offered to do what I was determined never to do, namely to seek the King among all his courtiers, and to put myself under obligation to him. Mr. Digby is a young gentleman with a long career of honour and glory before him, and I am a poor, low-born orphan, who, when her task is over, will willingly rest by her father's side. For me the gulf is too wide to be bridged over, even if he or I might wish it. In the face of an omniscient God, my lady! I declare that nothing will more encourage me in the task which I have undertaken to fulfil, than the consciousness that you are happy together. Love each other! make each other happy, but, once more, spare him!"

The lady was more moved than convinced. She grasped Mary's hand, and pressed it tenderly. "You do not seem to have bright prospects for yourself," said she, "and I share your forebodings, for the weapons with which you fight are not likely to secure your victory at this Court. Yours is the power now, but you may become again what you were before, and then when you stand alone in the midst of your enemies, then come to me——I am living in the wing occupied by the retinue of the Queen. Only ask for Miss Kennedy, and she will conduct you to a friend. Farewell, Mary. I have trusted in you. Never show

that you know me, if ever you meet me whilst you are in power."

Mary bowed her farewell; she did not accompany her to the door, but looked after her from the place where she had taken her seat. When she found herself alone, she raised her eyes to heaven; she folded her hands in prayer, and thus she stood motionless, whilst big tears gushed down her pale and trembling cheeks; her heart, full of emotion, endeavoured to utter itself in prayer, but that seemed quite impossible.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHILD'S MISSION AND A CHILD'S ILLUSION.

THE hunt had almost threatened to become a dearly-bought pastime for his Highness the Prince of Orange. On his return home, owing to over-excitement, he felt unable to sleep, in spite of all the soft cushions and pillows, under which he was almost buried and smothered by the care and attention of his servants. The soothing and warm draught, prepared by Widerts, had proved equally ineffectual, and, in spite of the express will of the patient himself the physician was standing by his bedside early the following morning.

His Highness looked almost frightened at the huge bottle, which had to be emptied to alleviate his troublesome shortness of breath and his violent headache. But a better medicine seemed to have been prepared by his royal uncle. The latter, having sent for his Highness to come and see him at Whitehall, and having been informed by his chamberlain that his Highness was in bed, had come to visit his nephew as early as eleven o'clock in the morning.

His company seemed to have gradually become indispensable to the King, and yet their relations hardly appeared to be of so friendly a nature as when the

uncle seemed to patronize and to pity the nephew; whilst the nephew seemed to shun his uncle with a kind of childish shyness. Now the parts had almost changed hands. Although the King sought his Highness's society, yet he was reserved, and so much on his guard that he invariably attached the worst interpretation to the young man's words; the Prince, on the other hand, now talked without any reserve, and with so much *abandon* and frankness did he unbend himself that his conversation partook of all the gaiety of the idle hours of gossip. And yet he only forced himself into it. He was lying, surrounded by cushions, in a large easy-chair, and was overwhelmed with gallipots and medicine-bottles of all descriptions. Even if his Majesty could have rid himself of his sombre mood, and brought himself to chat as the other chatted, he would still have been kept back by his suspicion that the illness was an assumed one. And yet his Majesty was mistaken this time. The indisposition of his Highness was not a mere pretext, any more than his happy mood and his display of frankness. William of Orange, through constant suffering, was accustomed to forget his ailments in his mental activity, and in treating of those affairs in which he felt thoroughly interested, and which demanded his earnest attention.

His Majesty's visit was in itself significant to him, inasmuch as it allowed him to guess so many things that were not yet uttered in words. His Majesty pretended to have come merely to inquire after his nephew's health, and the latter spoke only of the pleasures of the late hunt; but the one no more assigned the real cause for his morning call than the other showed the eagerness with which he received it. The

innuendoes of the nephew on their return from the hunt had filled the uncle with astonishment and dismay; he wished to give his thoughts a different direction, and had come to put the Prince on the wrong track in order to make him believe that all was simply play so far as Louis XIV. was concerned, who was made to pay subsidies wherewith to buy powder and shot to be fired upon his own soldiers afterwards. William, on being brought back to the field of politics, appeared to be equally easy-going, equally good-humoured and unsuspicious. "His Highness gave his Majesty too much credit for perspicacity, not to believe in a political masquerade, just as harmless as the one he had witnessed at Buckingham House; not to know that his august uncle would naturally look with distrust upon a friend, who undertook himself to march a hundred thousand men into the Republic, whilst he demanded no more than two or three thousand from his ally. His Majesty, the King of England, might fare as the wolf against a dozen dogs. The former might be the stronger by far, but still he could not withstand the force of numbers. Moreover, to treat with each other like equals, both should be under equal obligations one to another; and, in his humble opinion, no friendship could ever be lasting, where one friend was made to carry all the weight of the burden. He had seen an illustration of that in two noblemen of his retinue. They had been friends together from their earliest youth, until the one rendered a service to the other, which he was unable to reciprocate; their friendship suffered from it, and the bond which had united them slackened and broke asunder." What else could his Majesty answer to all that, now that he had once set

foot in the maze of falsehood, but "that he was entirely of his nephew's opinion; that he did not attach any particular importance to an alliance with France, that he had seriously made up his mind to join the Republic, to conciliate his Parliament, and that he had already commissioned Lord Shaftesbury to take some preliminary steps?"

The royal uncle took his departure, but without for a moment being the dupe of the nephew, who had so readily credited all his Majesty's fabrications, just to prove that the latter ought to turn out to be true, if the King wished at least to deserve credit for sense and sagacity. And then, to be compelled to acknowledge the justice of that youngster's words, to hear Louis XIV. described as the greatest enemy of the King of England, and to know all the while that such was really the case; that made him feel the more ill-disposed towards the gruel-drinking, jam-licking old woman of a boy, who was buried and crushed under the weight of his pillows.

"That Louise could be so base as to betray everything, the viper!" murmured he, as he returned to his closet. There he found Lord Arlington waiting for him, but the Secretary of State was this time sent away with the anything but pleasant censure, "You, too, were fool enough to egg me on to that alliance. I will not hear a word about it, nor about anything else in fact."

"If Henry,"—that was the Chevalier Boreel—"if Henry could manage to bring about a new alliance, and that through me, what would be my reward on my return to the Binnenhof?" This silent question, which his Highness put to himself after the King's departure,

was met by an answer equally tacit, but no doubt satisfactory, for a smile lighted up that emaciated face, distorted by an impeded respiration, and a feverish shiver through all his Highness's limbs, which caused the blood to rush through his aching head. He soon fell back on his pillows, and endeavoured to slumber; but in this he could not succeed. His acute hearing caused him to be attracted towards a confused noise, sounding almost like a quarrel or misunderstanding, and on inquiring into the cause of it, he was informed by Widerts that a rustic downstairs, who pretended to be a Hollander, absolutely demanded to see "the Prince;" he had been repeatedly told that his Highness could not be seen, whereupon he had asked when he might be allowed to come back, as he was bent upon seeing "the Prince."

"Show the man up, Widerts." All the secretary's objections were of no avail, and our old friend Dickens —for it was no other than he—decked in his Sunday clothes, ascended the marble steps with his heavy hob-nailed boots, and strode across the wooden floor so deliberately, but at the same time in such a thump-thump manner, that his Highness shook on his pillows.

"Good day, my friend," said the Prince, in his native tongue, and as he said so he held out his hand to the countryman, who grasped it in his red and horny fist, whilst a tear glistened in his honest eye.

"I have long wished to see you, Prince," said Dickens, likewise in Dutch, although with something of a foreign accent. "I learned from Sir Henry that you were over here, and so I wanted to call upon you; do you see? I know your Highness and I have never met before, because that is impossible; I have been

here more than twenty years, and your Highness was not yet born when I was tying up the peas in the garden of Honselaardyk——"

"Were you in my father's service? Sit down, friend! Do sit down; we are countrymen. Did you marry here? And how are you getting on?"

Dickens took a seat, and was soon engaged in animated conversation. He chattered about his wife and children, about Sir Henry and her ladyship, about Jacob and Mary Hollis, and he spoke with much spirit; for had not his Highness shaken hands with him, had not the Prince allowed him to sit down, and listened to him more attentively than even Sir Henry had ever done in his life? "And now we are up in London, and I am a-looking about me just like a squirrel at the top of a tree, afraid to remain, and afraid to come down. It is lucky that we have got our Charles back, but *how* we have got him back that remains to be seen; no cow is ever called brindled unless it is marked with a spot,* and our young master is anything but spotless I am afraid. If now we had our Mary back too, but then she is not to be persuaded! She has been entrapped, and cannot extricate herself." An explanation of these words, so mysterious to the Prince, made it evident that it was also for Mary's sake that the Hollander had come to see him. Dickens entreated him that he too would put in a word to deliver Mary from the King's Court. It now became clear to his Highness that the maiden, of whom his visitor was speaking, was identical with the singular child mentioned by the King. He be-

* Another Dutch proverb.

came more interested in her than he had been before, and put a few questions concerning her character and friends. And here followed the whole story; Dickens did not omit a single fact, and concluded as follows—"She is a girl—do you see? as I should wish one for your Highness, if she were a princess——Birds of a feather flock together, that's what I mean, when I want her to be out of that great palace, the sooner the better; rather a poor and hungry squirrel in the wood than the fattest calf in the shed!"

His Highness replied with a friendly nod, he rang the bell, and asked Widerts to give his guest a good glass of wine.

"A countryman of mine, Widerts, and an old servant of my father may have a good glass, I should think, and a *souvenir* into the bargain. Say, Dirk Jansz,* what would you like to have? Just look round the room, and take your choice; of course among my own property only, not anything of the furniture, my friend. Come, speak out boldly!"

The calm Hollander, who could often make so free with Sir Henry, stood as bashful as the chaplain; he stood, with quivering lips, and full of emotion, before that youth whom he could have clasped in his arms.

"Come, speak out boldly!" repeated his Highness, after having poured out another glass, and begged Widerts to drink with him, as he was not well enough to do so himself.

"If I may be allowed to speak my mind—may I

* The final Z stands for "son." The Dutchman's real name corresponds to Johnson.—T.

then, have what is hanging there?" he pointed at a sash of orange-silk, mounted at the ends with the plain initial W between silver stars, without a coronet or anything over it.

"Certainly, my friend, take it with you! Only I am not sure whether it will ever be any good to you," remarked the Prince, jocosely.

After having once more recommended Mary to his Highness, the simple rustic left, highly delighted with his treasure. "How gracious and kind the Prince had been towards him! Oh that he could do something for his Highness in return! If the Prince should stay until the spring, then he could send him something that few people in England could get so early and so good." Full of enthusiasm he came back to the inn. Here he found the chaplain all alone to share his happiness with him, but Mr. King listened to his tale in silence; he ventured at last to say, "that he too would like to have a look at London; he would wish to see Westminster Abbey, but he almost became giddy through the crowd of people that stared at him in the street."

How strange his Highness was! As free, as natural, and as chatty as he had been in the presence of the Hollander, he had never shown himself with any Englishman. It was as if he knew that every one of his countrymen liked him for his own sake, whilst the English courtiers, who moreover did not understand his little peculiarities, overwhelmed him with marks of respect, either for policy's sake or on account of his high connexion. He was himself of such simple habits, so averse to titles and ostentation of any kind; and hence his tact in conversing with the humbler classes, with the simple of heart.

"Widerts, my friend! just wash my head with some cold water, and give me my fur—I must go out," said he, as soon as Dickens had left. The faithful attendant uttered a sigh, for he knew from the first request that the usual headache was at its height, and now, in spite of that, his young master, who never changed his mind on any point, spoke of going out; besides which, many other things were preying upon his mind.

"There is a cutting wind; there are nothing but grey clouds; not any sun to be seen," remarked Widerts, as he bathed the burning forehead.

No answer followed.

"You will get the gout in such weather as this, and a cold would be very dangerous in your Highness's present state."

The young man pointed to his fur, and raised himself from his pillows. "Order my coach, Widerts. I shall not be long, so you must not be angry."

Could the faithful fellow remain angry, even if he had been vexed? He had at first obeyed much against his own will, but now he ran down stairs himself to have the coach as soon as possible, and defended his Highness's conduct against two of the gentlemen-in-waiting, who said, "that the young Prince was trifling with his health."

No doubt the expedition was an important one, for when the nobleman on duty asked whither he should direct the coachman, the answer was given in a mysterious whisper; "to Whitehall." After this his Highness entered the coach, unaccompanied by any one, but well sheltered from the piercing cold.

He was going to Whitehall, and the King had been that very morning to see him! Had he something to

tell him that admitted of no delay, something that had not been discussed or exhausted that morning? Idle questions! Unfounded suppositions! As his Highness drove up by one of the side-gates, he inquired for Miss Hollis.

"I do not know whether you will be admitted," said one of the lacqueys, who did not recognize his Highness. "However, you may try, although I would advise you first of all to make the acquaintance of old Kate."

He was admitted, however, without the interference of the latter, when he sent word to Mary, "that a friend of Dickens wished to see her." Shortly afterwards he found himself face to face with the singular child who had made so strong an impression upon his Majesty, and upon whom he looked as one such as he had seen several of——at a distance.

As she raised her eyes to him with some surprise, and did not break the silence, he said, just to begin, "You have a good friend in Dickens."

"May I know, sir, who it is that honours me with a visit?"

"One of Dickens's friends."

"You are welcome as such, but still all his friends bear a name."

"I am a countryman of his; my name is of little import. He requested me to give you one piece of good advice, and I wish to add another."

He took a seat with the greatest familiarity, and sat down without allowing her time to set the example, and without caring whether she did or not.

"Only your name, sir, would in my eyes give you a greater right to be my adviser."

"If I were to give you my name you would be none the wiser for it. Dickens would be glad to see you leave this palace, for reasons no doubt known to yourself."

Mary's cheeks became crimson. If that rude stranger had come for the purpose of insulting her, he had certainly succeeded, but the manner in which he did it might have been different and less painful. She naturally inferred from it that he looked down upon her, that he put her on a par with the—other women of the Court.

"If you are a friend of Dickens, sir, he must have told you why I cannot follow his advice?"

"Do you feel so comfortable here?"

"Sir, I have duties to discharge here, which you cannot or will not perhaps understand."

"Quite possible."

Both were silent; she was under the influence of that searching pair of dark eyes; he seemed lost in his survey of her countenance, in which he desired to read what was going on in her mind.

"If your father were still alive, do you think that he would approve of your staying here? You are a minister's daughter, are you not?"

"That is between him and me; between my God and myself, sir!"

He was silent again for a while, and she felt anything but comfortable in her broken and disjointed conversation with that coughing, angular stranger, whom she did not know whether to look upon as a man or a boy.

"You wished to give me advice, sir?" continued she, forgetting, in her anxiety to break the painful silence, that she had only just before denied the

stranger's right to do so, as long as he had not given his name.

"You can do a good work if you wish. I suppose you mean well towards your King."

These words, so coldly uttered, struck her painfully; they seemed again to convey a feeling of contempt, which was not in any way concealed.

"Warn him against his enemy on the Continent; against the King of France. Tell him that his own kingdom is in danger of that powerful neighbour, who now calls himself his friend, to make use of him afterwards. Do you see what I mean?"

Mary kept looking at him with a scrutinizing eye, which made him repeat his concluding words.

"In your King's own interest you must advise him to send away the spy of Louis XIV. Use all your influence to get the Duchess of Portsmouth dismissed. It is in the interest of your King that I proffer my advice. Will you follow it?"

"What my duty is here, sir, I am told by the voice of my conscience, and when I pray God that He may neutralize and destroy the evil influences at this Court, I do not do so upon your considerations, sir, for of those I do not understand anything, and I desire to hear no more of politics than I know of them already."

His Highness bit his lips. He saw that he was on the wrong track; he found himself face to face with a woman who aspired to be nothing else but a woman, and with one of that class he had rarely met before. In Louise's presence he had not been at a loss for words, for in her he combated a political *intriguante;* but before Mary he stood confused, for there was

nothing in her character which he could understand. So much, however, he did see, that he had to do with a woman who seemed destined to take an exceptional place among his uncle's courtezans.

The glance of that blue eye was so artless, pure, and gentle, that he could not help meeting it, and when he thought it indicated vexation or anger, he hastened to stay the rising passion by these words—

"I feel confident that you and I mean the same thing, Miss Hollis! I hope that God will crown your work with success, and if it be determined in His counsel, succeed it must, however weak the instrument may seemingly be."

"Yes, sir, that is what I believe with all my heart."

"When I spoke just now about political matters, I did so because every one at this Court, if he can talk seriously at all, only looks upon everything by their light. The preponderance of France threatens not only the power of this country, but also the religion which we both profess. The greatest support of France here is Louise de Quérouaille, and she must be the first to be removed."

"I believe you are indeed a friend of Dickens, sir; yes, sir. I do also believe that that woman keeps his Majesty from the path of righteousness, and that she may possibly lead him on to ruin; but how can her dismissal, or that of Lady Castlemaine, promote the good of the Church of Christ? There is already so much in the established church that is not good, and after their dismissal the faithful would be equally oppressed, if not more so, than they are now."

She did not understand him; she could not even follow him in his short, dry, but lucid explanation, that

whatever forms the churches outside Rome might have assumed, they were in essence but one; one denomination more than the other, but still all of them more or less were opposed to spiritual tyranny; she did not understand him when he told her that the prosperity of her country depended upon the maintenance of the national liberties, and the latter again upon the existence of the English Church, which could never be kept up if kindred institutions were to fall on the continent; she did not understand anything of all that, but still she listened very attentively. He could not stoop to the level of her comprehension; she could not expand her mind to the width of his views, for she was a child of her time, although a noble and well-developed one; he, on the contrary, although yet an infant by law, was a good deal in advance of his age; a wider sphere suited him than the one bounded by Roman or Protestant party spirit. The Dutch minister, who had been his teacher of religion, had often shaken his head in a doubtful manner, whenever the subject of his Highness's faith had been touched upon; he had often then called him a luke-warm Laodicean. For Mary there was but one true faith—that of the independent Nonconformists, although she was too charitable to follow her father in his harsh judgments on the "Bishops' Church" and any other denomination. The triumph of her faith could not be directly promoted by the dismissal of the Duchess of Portsmouth. The Prince's view might arise from a combination of political and religious considerations, hers was only prompted by the latter. She had been able to follow Lord Shaftesbury in his sketch of her country's misery, for he had

had the tact to hold forth merely the human side of the question; he had simply pointed to the royal courtezans as the cause of the King's moral humiliation and of the deplorable state of the country. She still wished, herself, for the dismissal of those two women; she still intended to ask his Majesty that favour, for his own sake, but when he had met her with an evasive answer, although with the promise that he would place no confidence in either, she had been silent; she had not dared to pass *too* quickly on, for fear of compromising the two great points—the King's conversion, and the preaching of God's word. And now she heard her unnamed visitor insist upon the dismissal of the Duchess of Portsmouth, and hint at that of Lady Castlemaine, as the first and highest duty devolving upon her.

"The Lord God has ordained me, sir, to point out the right path to my King, and that is all," was her reply.

"But the King is continually led away from the right path by the influence of those women."

"If it be the Lord's will that His Majesty be saved, and if He grant him to hear the Word, no doubt he will discard that woman."

"He must do that now, or else your labour will be impeded. You tempt God if you do not use all the means that have been placed at your command."

"But my labour would at once be arrested if I were to demand the dismissal of that woman."

"The King, then, shows his attachment to her! and her influence leads to ruin; that you acknowledge yourself. See how contradictory and inconsistent you are in your unwillingness to follow my advice."

She did not know what to answer, but yet she was by no means convinced; she shook her head as if to show her dissent.

"You do not see my position, sir! What construction will the King put upon my insisting on the dismissal of his mistresses; he who is so ready to believe in selfishness?"

She cast down her eyes as she asked this.

"If your conscience does not blame you, you will easily bear the suspicion."

"You are right, sir!" said she, with determination. On this point she perfectly agreed with him; what he now urged, she had often said to herself in order to bear the mistrustful conduct of so many others. "But if the King should continue to refuse, and I should sustain a defeat, then I should have to give up everything, and by endeavouring to grasp too much, I should lose even what I have already gained. Oh, the King has a good heart; the good seed has not fallen on the rock or among the thorns, sir, but the sacrifice which he might bring afterwards unasked should not be demanded too soon, when it might cost him a struggle for which he would be no match. You are a foreigner, and therefore do not know what changes have been introduced here already. The King works, and abstains from those sinful festivals which led him away from the earnest duties of life."

"Yes, that may be—for a moment perhaps. But you must forestal him. Render it impossible for him to make the trial, which is more pleasant, after all, to work with you, or to banquet with Louise de Quérouaille——? You are afraid of a decisive measure?" added he, in a more gentle and less commanding tone.

"You have not sufficient confidence in your good cause, Miss Hollis? The King *must* yield, if you persist in asking. You should not hesitate, for every moment increases the temptation, and consequently the danger of the King."

She stood for a moment absorbed in her thoughts; it was evident that a struggle was going on within her.

"You must no longer delay," said the Prince. If you believe in your mission, fulfil it."

"I will! I believe you are right; I lack courage, and I have too long yielded to fear. I will do what you wish." She approached him, grasped and pressed his hand, and looked long into his face with eyes darkened through excitement. The Prince of Orange experienced a hitherto unknown feeling; he felt the first vibration of a voice of nature, such as he had never heard before. As if dismayed by it, he drew his hand timidly away, and moved a step backward, but the moment after, he regretted having done so, and he would have wished to press that hand in his own again, in order, perhaps, once more, to retreat with the same timidity.

What Mary had done in all innocence became culpable in her eyes, now that she saw the way in which her mark of confidence was regarded. A crimson blush covered her face, and tears came into her eyes, whatever she did to repress them, so as not to increase her feeling of shame before the stranger.

"I hope you will remember me to Dickens," said she, at last, wishing to suspend the silence, and helping to put an end to the visit. "I am sure he will not come to see me again," said she, in such a tone of

sorrow, that the Prince, who perfectly understood her position at Court, was actually moved.

"Do not think that, Mary," said he, with more feeling than he had ever shown yet.

"Oh yes, sir, but I might have foreseen it. God's will be done."

"Can I do anything for you, Mary?" said the Prince, without knowing exactly why he asked the question. He seemed unwilling to go, and not ready to take Mary's hint.

"I thank you, sir; farewell."

He was now obliged to take leave, but was almost too preoccupied to rejoice at the idea that his plan was to be carried out, that the chances of his triumph were increasing. "She is a fanatic," murmured he, "a fanatic——deserving a better fate!"

When Mary first set out on her heavy task, she could hardly have suspected how much strength was required to discharge it. She had not deemed it an easy one, but yet not so very arduous as she now from day to day experienced it to be. She stood alone, surrounded by the scarcely suppressed ridicule of the courtiers on the one side, and persecuted by the ever-increasing suspicion of her friends on the other. The man whose conversion she had in view, for whose sake she bore all this, had shown at every interview that he did not understand her; he had found in her exertions on his behalf only a stimulus to his vanity. He had partly listened to her voice, but as if she owed him a compensation for that, he had begged for her love in return, and had spoken of raising her until she should be on a par with the first subject of the realm.

Yet she would persevere and fight for the good

cause. She even blamed herself for her lack of courage, as she now called her hesitation to induce the King to make the greatest sacrifice.

Strange enough, the longer she lived in the presence of the King, and the more she found her influence increasing, the more was her hope weakened of ever succeeding in what she had in view. Her moments of depression were more frequent, her longing for home much stronger, and the reminiscences of her youth more powerful. Only once had she seen Charles since his discharge. He had walked past Whitehall with his father; and when she saw him she had unconsciously stretched out her hands to cling to him and go away with him—far away from London. But such moments of weakness had ceased, and had been followed by intervals of energy, cheerfulness, and hope, the fruit of her reanimated faith.

It was in one of these moods that she received a visit from his Majesty; he was followed by a page, who put some papers upon the table, and then withdrew on a sign from his master.

"There is a cloud on your forehead, sire," said Mary, as she noticed the King's sombre countenance; "does it still cost your Majesty so much struggle and self-denial to do what you have yourself judged to be useful and necessary?"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" replied he, in a tone that was meant for raillery. "I must confess, Mary, that it would have been better for me and for my country had I always seen through your eyes. Had I been accustomed to work from my early youth it would be less hard to me now,—for hard it is! You, if you chose, could make my duties less arduous—nay, do

not look at me with so much surprise, my child! I believe that you are leading me in the right path, and that by following your advice I may expect a tranquil death-bed. But if that is to be bought at the price of a life full of *ennui*, then, surely, it is rather dear, Mary. Pray do not frown! I have been following your advice; I have already worked this morning with Clifford and Shaftesbury! I have been reading long epistles, remonstrances from my Parliament, which I have opened again for your sake. Oh, could I but work with Will—Buckingham, I mean—he is at all events not so dry."

"God forbid that your Majesty should have anything to do with that man!"

"Hush! Hush! as Secretary of State, I mean. Make yourself easy. As long as you stand by me no evil influence will reach me; I am seriously determined that a change shall take place, but for that I want your assistance, Mary. You must cease to live so secluded, as if you feared the outer world; you must show an interest in the affairs which, by your influence alone, I am able to deal with. Come, sit you down by my side. I am tired of reading, and therefore I wish *you* would read those papers for me. Whenever I hear your voice I am sure to listen attentively, and when I act upon your sound judgment I never go wrong. Arlington has drawn up these papers, but I wish to see through my own eyes, especially in our foreign affairs; did you not always advise me to do so, Mary?"

She did sit down, although she found that the King drew his seat rather too close to her own, and she began to read a long diplomatic missive from the British ambassador at Versailles. She

thought of the words spoken by her unknown visitor, and could now understand the meaning of the missive, although the words in which it was couched were not quite clear to her.

"Your Majesty is therefore for postponing the signing of the treaty? No doubt your Majesty has good reasons for that. Either that treaty is unjust in the eyes of God, or the postponement is criminal before the same tribunal?"

"I wish the treaty had never been entered into, my child! Oh, but you are too lovely to wander in the crooked paths of politics."

"Where the precepts of the Lord are followed up, sire, there is no need of tortuous paths."

"You have, of course, never been in Whitefriars, the abode of all the thieves. There you might be engaged in expounding the Ten Commandments, more especially 'Thou shalt not steal,' and whilst you were doing so, they would quietly ease you of everything they might look upon as superfluous. Believe me, you would not keep much for yourself. So it is in politics; be honest, and you are the simpleton that has to pay for everything. Honest? How many honest people are there in the world, think you?"

"Many, sire! Be honest, punish dishonesty, and you will prosper. A fine triumph indeed for one thief to deceive the other! And yet that must be the case. It is a true word of the Lord: 'with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.' The King of France may have deceived you, and you will endeavour to do the same in your turn; and if you succeed, he will try to make up for his loss to-morrow, and lie in ambush like a highwayman. No,

not thus! That which is unworthy even of the humblest subject should never disgrace and humble the anointed of the Lord."

"Oh Mary! How you would have to modify your ideas if you were yourself such an anointed!"

"No, indeed not, sire! What the humblest man is able to do, that certainly is possible to one who is so highly placed. I have heard you so often complain of the burden of royalty; I thank God, sire, that you are privileged to bear it."

"I might be able to bear it, Mary, if you would only assist me."

"What the humblest man finds possible to do, that cannot be impossible to the King in any way. The sinner is a slave; the sovereign who does not govern according to the laws of God, but according to the impulse of his passions, he too is a slave; and a slave, wearing a crown, and seated on a throne, is a disgraceful spectacle in the eyes of God. God has given His anointed the power, and woe to him if he does not use it to support the weak and humble the proud; to punish crime, and to enrich his country with such means as He has placed at his command; to do good to all, and not to think of his own rest and enjoyment only. Be such a King, sire! Try; you have never been a King yet!"

Charles Stuart had listened with breathless attention while she spoke thus emphatically. Her words struck him as they alone could strike him. The tears stood in his eyes; he took her hand, and said with the greatest emotion, "I will be King, with and through you, Mary, dearest. I can become such a King through you only. Help me, support

me more than ever. Hitherto you have merely pointed out the way to me, but you have allowed me to walk alone. Mary, walk in the way with me, love me as I love you!"

Was that all she had brought about? No, it was not the words, but her own personal charms that held his soul spell-bound. She withdrew her hand and stood up. "You speak to me of your love as you have done to so many before me. Love, sire! do not tarnish that word! We love but once! Love! Love raises, but it humbles not; it is self-denying, not selfish; it may—that I believe—lead us away from God, and His commandments, but it never drags us to the pool of low vulgarity."

"What do you say? What do I hear, Mary? Do you think I should lead you thither? Mary, what have I done to deserve such suspicion?"

"Whilst you speak to me of your love, what is going on? The woman whom you accepted as your wife before the eyes of God, is a powerless stranger, and, in her stead, govern two others! Sire! do not speak to me of your love; speak of your duties only. You wish to be a King after God's own heart. . . . Show yourself one by more than mere promises and words —— You wish no longer to be a slave on the throne of England? Well, prove it by dismissing those women from your Court!"

Charles Stuart trembled, and bowed his head. "They do not govern now, Mary! Why ask for that? They cannot be in your way."

"That is quite true," answered Mary, haughtily. "It is not for my sake, but for yours, that I beseech you to dismiss them; pray let them go at once; re-

move the witnesses of——your disgrace"—whispered she, as she came nearer, and bent her head toward him.

"Mary," exclaimed he, and for a moment a flash of anger rushed through his eye, but he immediately cast it down again before hers. "Afterwards, by-and-bye, I will do what you ask me. I pledge you my word!"

"You have said so before. Why should you postpone a good work that can be done to-day? Are the bonds then so fast that you cannot break them asunder? Act at once, sire! if you will listen to me, if you acknowledge that I lead you in the right path, act at once!"

"And will you then walk in the path with me?"

Much seemed to depend upon the answer she might give. She had always expected that question, and hence her long hesitation to insist upon the dismissal of these two women. If she answered in the affirmative, she might save the anointed of the Lord, and with him a whole people!——But then—she ought to be a Judith, and that she never could.

"That path you shall not walk with me either," answered she at last, "if I have been your only guide thither, and if not, you can walk it to an end without me. Sire! if you have no strength to make the sacrifice, which God demands through me, then my mission is over."

"Surely you do not intend to leave me, Mary?"

"I shall be obliged."

"Grant me two days' respite."

"No, sire! I have nothing to grant or to deny; it is the voice of God speaking through me, and crying loudly: 'Act at once.'"

"But, Mary, do you not see, then, that something more than love binds me to these women? I have duties to fulfil towards both of them."

"You must fulfil them, but not at this Court. The one must go back to her own country, and the other to her husband."

"Impossible! impossible, for the present. I beseech you, Mary! do not destroy your own work."

"My work will either prove to be the Tower of Babel or the Temple of Jerusalem; if the former, let it be destroyed: if the latter, it will stand, whatever may happen, and be a blessing to many. Sire!" added she, after a while, "Sire! this is the moment to decide. Can you make the sacrifice and stamp your resolution to be a King with such a seal? Answer, sire!"

"If you will love me—! Mary! I will raise you above all."

"First prove your own greatness, sire!"

"Child! child, I hold you to be an angel, but you can become a demon!" exclaimed he, in utter despair.

"I suspected that," sighed she. "He cannot make the sacrifice. I have risked everything, and I have lost. Farewell, sire!" said she aloud.

"No, Mary, no! do not leave me. You will gradually learn to love me. Be it so, Mary. Let them go! But immediately! I will not see them any more; I will hear no complaints."

"Sire! are you quite in earnest? Have you brought yourself down to do so, because you think it is a good and holy deed? If not, sire! do not do it."

"What! that again!" exclaimed the King, beside

himself. "Shall I even have to thank you? But go,—and do the deed."

"Not I, sire! that is your Majesty's duty."

He took a sheet of the paper that lay on the table, and wrote a few lines. "There is the order—have it carried out. Mary! you have much to make good."

"Sire! take the order back; with those words, I cannot accept it. No benefit is conferred upon me, but upon you, and upon your people."

"I admit that. Keep it," and, as if he were afraid of changing his resolution, he rushed off, and left Mary alone with the royal decree before her. Between her fingers she held the fate of the two women that governed England, and she did not hesitate for a moment. She sent for Lord Shaftesbury, and remitted the order to the astonished but rejoicing minister.

"England will show her gratitude," exclaimed he. "You have rendered the greatest service to the King and to the country. He perused the order carefully:

'*The Duchess of Portsmouth and the Countess of Castlemaine are requested to leave Whitehall; they will await our pleasure, the former at Hatfield Manor, the latter at Oxford.* 'CHARLES, REX.'

"The triumph is not so final that we should not be on our guard, Miss Hollis. Will you permit me to come here to-morrow to give you a report of what I have done?"

"I wish to hear nothing more about it, my lord!"

"I understand; the past lies behind us; both of us have a glorious career before us. Under your auspices we shall soon form a new cabinet. I will take

the liberty to-morrow to introduce some gentlemen to you whose views you will approve of."

"I will have nothing to do with those things, my lord! Perhaps his Majesty will better understand you than I do."

With these words she put an end to any further solicitations from the minister to join his party; she endeavoured to convince him, but in vain, that she felt a higher mission than that of taking part in the affairs of the government, and of making a party prevail through her influence. Shaftesbury, as if he doubted that the triumph would be lasting, as if he feared that his Majesty would revoke his order, set to work with the greatest expedition. He sent for the captain of the Life-Guards, and ordered him to hold two coaches and two escorts in readiness. Accompanied by that gentleman, and a few members of the Privy Council who were in his confidence, he went first to Lady Castlemaine.

On his arrival her ladyship was just examining some costly materials presented to her by a French milliner, and by her side, on a magnificent and valuable rug, lay a beautiful Maltese dog, which she had bought only a few days before for reasons unknown to herself.

"What an agreeable surprise to see my lord Shaftesbury in such gallant and right honourable company!" exclaimed she. She threw the dresses immediately into the boxes, and gave the *modiste* a sign to depart.

"What may I offer you, my lords? *Parfait amour*, or——"

"Nothing, my lady!"

"Nothing at all? not even bread and salt, which are not denied to the savage?"

"That least of all, my lady! considering the purpose of our visit."

So saying, Lord Shaftesbury presented the order from his Majesty. She read and re-read it, but did not seem to believe her eyes, until his lordship was charitable enough to assist her in the reading. "But it is impossible! It is a jest, it is treason which may cost you your head. I will go and speak to his Majesty."

"His Majesty is not at home to you."

"But I will."

"That is a verb, my lady, which has lost its present tense for you."

"That viper! That French siren!" murmured she. Her fingers trembled as she clung to the table to conceal her agitation. "I shall be ready this evening."

"The coach is waiting for you *now*."

These words were followed by an outburst of rage, which Shaftesbury and his friends witnessed with the utmost calmness, whilst the exhaustion produced by her excitement caused her not much longer to resist the royal decree. Lady Castlemaine, in disgrace with His Majesty, and pitied by no one, took her place in the coach that had been sent for her. She drove off with the swiftness of an arrow, under a strong escort, and accompanied only by a few strange attendants.

The reception which the Duchess of Portsmouth prepared them was quite a different one. She was occupying herself in teaching her parrot to speak, and rewarded the prattling of the bird with loud and shrill laughter. After having read the royal order, her face

did not betray the slightest mark of surprise. "You must confess, gentlemen," said she, with the utmost coolness, "that it is rather early in the season to move to Hatfield Manor. Be good enough to inform his Majesty that I expect him there very soon, or—not at all. My kind respects to my Lady Castlemaine. My good Jack, must he part with me? Tell my lady that I entrust her with that cunning animal as its most fit and proper keeper."

A few hours later the whole Court was in commotion. No end of groups formed themselves in the dining-halls, in the reception-rooms, in the galleries, and there was but one topic of discussion—the news of the day. Not anything more important had occurred in the United Kingdom since the execution of his Majesty Charles I. Every one was most impatiently looking out for the dinner-hour, but, alas! his Majesty did not appear. The King had given orders to be served alone in his closet. New hopes were fixed upon the evening reception, but once more in vain. His Majesty wished to pass the evening in quietude.

"His Majesty is becoming independent," whispered one of the courtiers, with a significant nod to his neighbour.

"Suppose we call upon Miss Hollis," replied the other, with a bitter smile. But again they were disappointed. Miss Hollis did not receive anybody.

Whitehall seemed empty. It was, in the jargon of high life below stairs, "as if there was a corpse in the house;" and the same idea, although not so elegantly formed into words, was entertained by the principal inmate of the palace, as he sat by himself in his closet.

Still one compensation was reserved for his Majesty, for the numerous troubles which he had brought upon himself. The glass reflected the lurid torches and bonfires, carried and lighted by the shouting and rejoicing multitude that was passing Whitehall with unfurled banners, suggestive of the Sovereign's honour and of the disgrace of his courtezans.

Lord Shaftesbury had taken care that all London should be informed of what had taken place, and that the people should express their joy by this kind of demonstration.

CHAPTER V.

REFORM IN ANOTHER DIRECTION.

CHARLES DIGBY had eagerly seized the opportunity of returning to the old familiar apartments in the royal palace. His return thither was certainly prompted by a desire to escape from his friends at the inn, of whom he was somewhat ashamed, but still more by his longing for the presence of the unknown lady who, he suspected, resided in Whitehall. Was it not strange that he did not hear from her at all, that he did not receive the slightest token of her affection, of which—it was useless to deny it—he stood so much in need? The last remembrance which he had of her cast a little stain on her spotless image. Had not her anxiety to be saved pushed aside all her affection, so that she had not spoken a single word of farewell, nor made any promise of a renewed interview? Still she was the only one he cared for, the only one who had not wronged him. But no, he was unjust to himself; he thought of Mary too, of Mary who, as he had just learned from John Dickens, was still living under the roof of Whitehall, under the patronage of Lady Castlemaine. Why had not she gone? How was it that she continued to breathe an atmosphere which must be oppressive to the pure in

heart? Was it possible that she could feel at home there? that she could move there like my lady, for instance? Such an idea he could not entertain; the thought was painful to him. He was determined to employ his liberty better than before. He would see Mary; he would endeavour to induce her to return with his father and her friend Dickens; he would save her, if it were still possible to do so. John had not needlessly grieved him by telling him that the companion of his youth had obstinately refused to speak to Lady Castlemaine on his behalf; he had merely informed him that all his efforts in his master's favour had been fruitless; at first he had met with nothing but unfriendly looks from his master's highly esteemed friends, but with every new report that his Grace was progressing favourably, one or more frowns had dropped from their dismayed countenances.

Charles's first visit was reserved for his Majesty, who had been graciously pleased to grant his pardon, and for whom he entertained a feeling of gratitude that was predominant over all his inward emotions. On his way to the royal apartments he met with Monmouth and Sidney, who approached him with a somewhat embarrassed demeanour.

"We were just going to call upon you, Charles. We heard this morning of the glorious news," said Harry. "During all that time we have lived here like hermits."

"Your Grace bears the sign of it on your face," replied Charles, coldly.

"Hallo! Charles, what's that? Upon my honour," said Sidney to his friend, "they have given him nothing but cold water to drink."

"Just so, my lord! I had been for weeks in a state of intoxication, but the water-cure to which your lordship alludes, has had a salutary and sobering effect upon me."

"This conversation is a merry one indeed! By Jove, our estimable friend must be piqued that we have not allowed ourselves to be shut up together with him. If he looks upon matters in that light, then we cannot but thank him, Sidney, for the good opinion which he entertains of us; he shows, at all events, that he has felt the need of us. But, my boy, we have tried to see you, and we have been refused at the gate; we had a jolly good mind to take your prison by storm, but for that we were not strong enough. Give us your hand, Charles, and let us be friends again."

They both held out their hands, and Charles could not well decline their grasp. The reconciliation was, however, anything but cordial, especially on Charles's part, who added, with a bitter smile, "I suppose that his Grace of Buckingham is getting better by this time?"

They either did not understand the insinuation or did not think it too severe. We may safely suppose the latter, for stability in friendship, as in love, was a very rare quality in those times and at that Court; nobody was ever surprised to see the friend of yesterday turn suddenly cool to-day, and become an enemy to-morrow.

In this respect Charles proved once more that he came from Hallam, and was not yet quite naturalized in Whitehall.

"Yes, he is getting better," replied Harry, "and that is fortunate for all of us and for you too, Charles, if you know how to make peace with him, which no

doubt you will do; as things are going here just now we shall soon all be in a galloping consumption. The King has turned pious; he has been converted by your friend, happy mortal!"

Harry tapped him on the shoulder with a knowing look, and laughed.

"Converted by whom?" asked he, with surprise.

"Why, by Miss Hollis, or rather by the future Countess or Duchess of—— You had better find the name, man! You may be called upon to influence the choice."

"Impossible!"

They entered, however, into so many details, and ridiculed so strongly his ignorance of passing events, that he could no longer doubt the fall of her Ladyship and of her Grace.

"You must introduce us to your friend. Hitherto she has not vouchsafed to receive anybody, his Majesty of course excepted, but your old intimacy—— His Majesty has never been jealous of anybody except of Madame Carwell."

"Silence, my lord!" cried Charles, as he grasped the hilt of his sword. "I prize too highly the friendship of both of you. I have the honour to wish you good day."

He left both behind in the greatest astonishment. Angry with what he heard, and dissatisfied with the form in which it had reached his ears, he was at the same time highly indignant at the sly calculations of those rising and promising diplomatists, who sought his friendship because he was supposed to be the friend of her who, from the arms of Buckingham, had thrown herself into those of the King. Oh, disgrace! disgrace!

For a while he walked on half unconsciously, nor did he recover himself until he had reached one of his Majesty's ante-rooms, where he had to wait with many others, who all desired an audience of the King, now that they could no longer see or speak to him at the public dinners, or at the merry evening receptions. No *bon-mots* now, no sonnets, no epigrams. There were other matters to be disposed of; many of the cabinet ministers were waiting even with papers under their arm. There was an air of seriousness on all those faces, as if they knew that something similar was to emanate from the side doors, as if they felt it necessary that their appearance should be in harmony with that of their august master. We should not, however, apply this severe consideration to all of them, for there were several who, as regarded seriousness, had long set the example to their King. For years they had not been near Whitehall, but the removal of the two hateful women had induced them now to approach the throne.

If Digby had still entertained the slightest doubt about what he had learned from his quasi friends, here the news would have reached him from all quarters. He had to wait for some time, and had therefore ample opportunity of hearing about all that had been going on, modified, commented upon, and duly coloured by different individualities. Whatever praise he heard bestowed upon Mary Hollis, upon her knowledge, her sagacity, her virtues, his anger and pity were increasing, and he esteemed himself very happy when he found an opportunity of disentangling himself from the surrounding circle, and of being admitted into the presence of his Majesty.

The latter was sitting, or rather reclining, in an arm-chair, with his head leaning on his hands, before a table covered with papers, which were being arranged and sorted by Lord Shaftesbury.

"Come nearer, Mr. Digby," was his Majesty's curt greeting.

Not only did it strike Charles that the tone in which his Majesty addressed him was a very unusual one, but the *ensemble* of the King's appearance seemed to harmonize with his words.

Instead of that ease and nonchalance which alone made Charles Stuart so popular with the English courtiers of the day, his face bore on this occasion something like a repulsive aspect.

Charles obeyed the royal command; he approached his Majesty's seat as near as possible, and then bent down on one knee. He expressed his gratitude for the mercy bestowed upon him of being restored to liberty, and of being permitted to carry the sword again in his Majesty's service.

"Do not carry it for our sake only, Mr. Digby, but also for the honour of our people. Make a better use of it than you have hitherto done."

"Sire, when a man has accepted a sword from your Majesty, he must also take care that his honour remain untarnished."

"So I hope yours is. I have set you free for the sake of somebody for whom I have the highest regard, but whose request in this respect has certainly surprised me. I hope you will cease that kind of *liaisons* which give rise to obnoxious quarrels. I want order about me, and shall keep an eye upon you."

Charles was disappointed and dismayed by a recep-

tion so humiliating, so severe, and so little deserved. Why had his pardon been signed whilst the King was still angry with him for having dared to punish his favourite, the Duke of Buckingham? Why was it? He gradually came to see it when he breathed a different atmosphere, and began to ponder over all he had heard. The King hated him because he was Mary's friend; the King had granted his pardon at her request. He felt humiliated by the royal favour obtained from Charles Stuart through her. Not through Lady Castlemaine, but through Mary, had he been delivered. She had been thinking of him, but the pleasure which this idea afforded him was fully counterbalanced by the reflection that she had so great an influence over the King. He would see her, even if he were a second time to incur his Majesty's displeasure; with hurried steps he passed the now empty apartments of Lady Castlemaine, and with a throbbing heart he knocked at the door of Mary Hollis, now the most privileged of all women in the United Kingdom.

And that privileged woman trembled and shivered like a culprit when she saw the young officer who had ventured to knock, but who stayed his footsteps on the threshold. He did not know how often she had been standing at that window to see whether he might pass, and, if he did go by, what trouble she would take to get a sight of his face, in order to discover whether it bore the traces of his imprisonment, or whether it denoted grief for his desolate condition.

He that stood there could not know that all his ways had been watched by Kate and all the officials she could bribe, nor that Mary was perfectly cognizant of the fact that he had not of late been to the pernicious Club.

We have seen Charles approach her apartments with the firm resolution of saving her "if possible," but not as an adviser or a judge was he now standing there, the finished gentleman, generally so proud in the consciousness of having shown his courage and his determination—almost like the Charles of Hallam, like the Charles of other days, did he stand before his playmate, his superior in knowledge and energy.

What happened now had taken place so often before; she had to take the initiative, she had to broach the subject, it was she who invited him to speak out what was at the bottom of his heart. Yet he did so in a somewhat different manner. No doubt he had changed much, but she had changed still more, and that which others had left unnoticed, who had never known her in her country life, struck Charles Digby in a moment. No, that was no longer the humble, sombre, serious young woman who never betrayed a smile, except when her playmate approached her with his childlike troubles, and she endeavoured to alleviate or to remove them. No, that was not the woman, crushed, humbled, disgraced, whom he had seen at his feet in the streets of London; no, that was rather the offended and indignant lady who had rejected his protestations at the palace of the contemptible Duke. Still she was not quite what she was then. On that evening her tearful eye had been flashing with anger, now her demeanour was serious, cold, alas! and haughty. Oh, he would rather have wished, after all, to see her again humbled or angry than with that appearance of dignity, with that consciousness of her power and influence—the former, he thought, could only result from the latter; and what was her influence, her power, but—disgrace?

It never occurred to him at this moment that he had no right to be the accuser, even if there were any foundation for his supposition, even if her guilt were greater than he imagined. He seemed to demand from her, as his due, that she should preserve all the spotlessness of innocence.

"Are you mistaken in the apartments, Mr. Digby?" asked she, while she cast down her eyes, and while her knees trembled under her black velvet dress.

"Why so, Miss Hollis?" asked he, hesitatingly. He found it difficult to address her in that ceremonious manner, but still he wished to be equally cold, he would betray no more than herself that he could scarcely govern his feelings.

"Because I have less reason to suppose that your visit was intended for me, than for her who used to be my next-door neighbour."

A sudden blush coloured Charles's face.

Was that an accusation from her lips? He replied somewhat sarcastically, "For her who used to be, but who is so no longer, thanks to your influence."

"And that is what you blame me for, is it not, Mr. Digby?"

"No, Mary, not for that, but only for the influence which you have," exclaimed he, passionately, unable to bear any longer the constraint under which he had uttered his opening remarks.

Had not his excitement prevented his observing closely, how would he have rejoiced at the sudden change that came over her countenance. It is true, it was for a moment only, but the gaze of her eye, during that single moment, was so full of tenderness and gratitude, that he might have inferred a good deal

from it. Another thought, however, caused her features to assume the same cool indifference as before, and with a certain harshness she asked him, "What right or claim has Mr. Digby to sue me before his tribunal, or call me to account?"

Such a question fell like a block of ice upon his warm heart. It pained him, and did not leave him either time or power to reflect, to calculate his words in order the better to frame his answer in accordance with her question. With a bitterness that betrayed a tender feeling at the same time, he replied, "I have certainly no right to do so, and even if I had, I should never enforce it where I am thus asked for the titles; but still I may have reason, if I have no right. After having shared weal and woe together for years, when I thus find again the child that I left at home modest and humble, pious and fearing God, there may be a reason if not a right for me to ask whence your power at a Court where modesty has no root, and piety fades away?"

"And of both Mr. Digby has personal experience," said she, half asking, half affirming. Her reproach entered deeply into his heart. Oh, if she had only grown angry, if she had only looked at him reproachfully with those blue eyes of hers, that had lost nothing of their wonted clearness; that he could have better withstood, then he would more easily have found an answer. But she spoke to him so calmly, as her eye turned away from him; she seemed so indifferent!

"I presume that your experience of this corrupted Babylon does not date from yesterday, and yet you never came to me before. You have no right, but yet reason, you say, to question me. But such reason

either does not exist at all, or it existed long ago, Mr. Digby."

"Call me Charles, Mary! Mary, call me Charles! I confess that appearances are against me. I ought to have come sooner to your rescue, I ought to have been your protector long ago, and I was willing enough, for I have always felt the same towards you, but the vortex of worldly enjoyment has made me giddy and turned my head, has led me to forget you, and has brought about what I might, partly at least, have prevented."

These words denoted his good nature, but at the same time they implied contemptuous pride. For the sake of the former she could have overlooked the latter, she more than any one, if she could only have looked upon Charles in another, in a better light than that of a young man who had gone astray, and who had come to a standstill through accidental circumstances.

"Surely I have not given you any reason to imagine that I asked as much as that," replied she, with some bitterness. "Your support? It might have been useful to me, but do not reproach yourself about that, now that I am not likely to require it. Your conscience need not accuse you, since you were willing to rescue me. The letter which you wrote to me when I lay ill and lonely on my sick-bed in Wilkins's house—ill, and condemned even by those good people—did not that prove that you were willing to help me? Did you not help me?"

"Mary, do not speak in such a tone? Has that letter offended you? It never was my intention; never, upon my honour. What did it contain that could thus hurt you?"

To this Mary made no reply; she could not blame its cool unfeeling tone, for had she a right to demand any other from him?

"Was it because I insisted upon your leaving London? Has that offended you? Could that offend you? Oh, that would grieve me beyond expression, for that, Mary, would confirm my original suspicion!"

"Charles Digby," said she, in a choking voice, "if your heart does not tell you what there was in those lines to grieve a lonely forsaken girl that had come to deliver her father, then my tongue would be powerless; let us not call up any reminiscences that must be painful to both of us. My sufferings I *have* gone through. Let us terminate a conversation which can only render more visible the gulf which there is between us. And that is not my desire, Charles. Do you want my assistance, you or your father, that you have come to see me now?"

"No, Mary, no. And even if I had come with that intention I would rather die than approach you with a word of supplication. Is it that supposition which makes your tone so bitter towards me? No, even the thought that my deliverance and rehabilitation are owing to your influence with the King, is painful to me, and grieves me. No, I have not come hither to ask you for additional favours, not even to express my gratitude for the service which you have already rendered me, for I desire no advantages or privileges at the price of your virtue or honour."

She did not follow him in his outburst of passion; she did not feel humbled by the insulting insinuation which at last had crossed his lips. On the contrary, her stern features lighted up, there was something in

that countenance that was suggestive of concealed gratification. He believed in her dishonour, and the thought of it was painful to him!

"Still, before I tell you what has brought me hither, what is *the* one thing I entreat you to do, I will endeavour to clear myself, or—if I should not succeed in that, at least I will try to extenuate my guilt." He became the accused now instead of the accuser. "I knew nothing of your abduction, and there I found you, unexpectedly at midnight, in the streets of London. You will answer that you found me there too. Admitted; to that I have no reply; but then I had not so much to lose as you, Mary, who always were to me a model of piety and purity. I could not understand what had caused you to fall so deeply; but everything led me to believe you had. Not until afterwards did I hear of what had befallen you; I learned it from her whom you have caused to be sent away—perhaps—to be her successor——"

"Proceed, Charles," said she, in a gentle whisper, as he stopped for a moment after these words.

"It was not until afterwards that I learned what I might have known sooner had I gone to see you. The thought of this neglect, added to the report of your wrong, then drove me to a deed which has been called reckless and foolish, but which I should not hesitate to do again under similar circumstances. I have wished to make good my wrongs towards you; I have proved to my own satisfaction what my playmate was worth to me."

"Of what deed are you speaking?" asked she, with surprise.

"Of the one that caused my arrest. I do not

boast of it, Mary; but I am anxious to remove your misapprehension in order to increase the influence which you may allow me to exercise in your resolution by and bye."

"But I do not understand you," exclaimed she, impatiently. "You have gambled, and, as they say, you played false—that was dishonest and unmanly."

"Did she tell you that, Lady Castlemaine, who came to deliver me, after having rejected me? Horrible! No, it was to avenge you, Mary, on your seducer——"

"Do not use that word, Charles; for that he is not. He was only a wretch, but no more. And you risked your life on my account? You fought that man for my sake? I thank you, Charles—I thank you."

The tears stood in her eyes; she held out her hand, or rather she grasped his hand and pressed it; there came a feeling of bliss over her; a feeling of emotion rose from the bottom of her heart, which she imagined that she had stifled long ago, but which showed itself in its full vigour again, and which she hailed back with inward triumph. She could hardly restrain herself; she withdrew her hand suddenly, and turned her face towards the window, where she endeavoured to wipe away the tear that moistened her eyelashes.

Charles watched her movements with some surprise. Far from guessing the real cause of her emotion, he ascribed it to regret for her former coolness towards him, to delight that the companion of her youth had not entirely forgotten her, that he was still susceptible of noble aspirations and capable of a manly action. The latter consideration made even a painful

impression upon him, so much so as to suppress all others, for he remarked, not without some vexation, "The deed I did was nothing very particular, Mary; every gentleman would have acted similarly in my position." She did not listen to him, her thoughts were wandering in quite a different direction. She had to reconnoitre; all that was a new domain to her; she wanted certainty instead of ever recurring doubt. By that one deed Charles Digby had proved that he had not lost in the sinful embraces of his mistresses the strength and energy to combat villany, even at the price of great self-sacrifice: but was Charles Digby, her playmate, her friend, free from every tie? She had recovered herself, and addressed him once more.

"Charles," and the sound of her voice recalled to him the time when they walked together from Dickens' garden to her father's cottage, "Charles, whom did you expect to meet when you found me at Buckingham House?"

"How did you get there, Mary?"

"Through her that lived here before. But I am not speaking of myself, only of you, Charles. Whom did you take me for when you treated me with so much familiarity, I should almost say with so much rudeness?"

Her last observation betrayed entirely the weakness of the woman; she was by no means above it, however strong and brave she might be called.

Charles remained silent, and she rejoiced in that—was it not a sign that he was ashamed of this intrigue as well as of the other? But how bitterly was she disappointed when she inferred from his words that his silence was the result of a cause entirely different from

what she had suspected. "Mary," said he at last, "do not despise her, that is beneath you. If you knew her, I feel sure you would love her as a friend, you would thank God for having sent to your playmate such a woman."

"You know her very well then?" asked she, with a trembling voice.

"She has taught me what love is. Her whisper is as gentle and tender as I imagine those of the angels in heaven; her love is so genuine that it makes her a stranger at this Court. Oh, if you knew her, Mary!"

"Her love is genuine, and that is why she calculates so well every one of her chances; that is why she has so acute an ear for every threatened danger, in spite of the mask that hides her features. Her love is strong, but yet not strong enough to bridge the gulf which her birth and rank have interposed between you and her."

"What do you refer to, Mary? What can your words mean?"

"I have seen her without a mask, Charles."

"You have seen her, the fair unknown, my guiding star? You have seen her? Describe to me her face, her features, Mary."

"That is her outward appearance only," replied Mary, with some irony; "and even that she has concealed from you, who maintain that you know her so well."

"The eye need not see to convince the soul. Mary, if I had never seen you, if I had only heard you once, I should have known you all the same."

"We are not speaking about me, the orphan daughter of Jacob Hollis, but of her, the high-born

lady who pretends to love you, and who is ashamed of you, Charles."

"You misunderstand her. That is an ungenerous insinuation of yours, Mary! That I should have expected from Lady Castlemaine, but not from you."

"He loves her indeed!" murmured she.

"Pardon my rashness, Mary. I spoke without reflecting. You too did not mean what you said. She came to see you, you say, and I understand with what intention. She begged for your influence to restore me to liberty. I knew that she would not forget me as so many others did. She is surrounded by great dangers; she is watched and spied, and yet she ventured to visit you, and to ask for your assistance. She did not know you, and yet she risked everything to save me. That was worthy of her."

Mary concealed her clenched little hands in the folds of her dress. "She came too late," replied she. "I had already obtained your pardon. Her intention was, I doubt not, very good, only she came too late."

"Yet it was her intention to save me," replied Charles, passionately; "her efforts are to me as estimable as the deed. But, tell me, is not the expression of her face a noble one? Does not she resemble the angels which we see in pictures? Does not her animated look express both gentleness and energy?"

Without being aware of it he had described the face of her that stood before him; unconsciously his imagination had pictured to him the image of his playmate.

Mary gave a sign of dissent.

"I do not undertake a picture in which I might

not succeed, and which, at all events, you would never be satisfied with. At some time perhaps she will have the courage to come undisguised before you."

"But it is no lack of courage or love that has hitherto kept her back. You are unfair, Mary; she has shown that she dares defy everything for my sake." He became more and more excited, although he had some difficulty in convincing himself of what he wished to enforce upon Mary. "How is it that you will see nothing but evil in her? Suppose she did wear her mask out of bashfulness, out of modesty, has Mary Hollis become so naturalized to Whitehall as to ridicule and condemn that?"

"You are excited, Mr. Digby," said she, as coolly as before, "you are excited, and therefore unfair. I have no doubt you love that woman, but then you have loved so many others before."

"Mary! Mary!" exclaimed he, full of emotion; "but I have deserved my fate. Yet I never loved any one like this one. I wish I could convince you of that, because in that case no doubt you would judge her differently. What has she done to you that makes you so wroth?"

"Nothing to me, Charles; but I imagine that she is not to you what she ought to be. The words just now uttered were prompted by my interest in your fate. Whom would I rather see happy than you?"

Her voice trembled, her fingers quivered; her eyes once more turned away from him.

"Did she say then, Mary, that she did not love me?" asked the young man, anxiously waiting for a reply, which cost Mary very much, and which she was slow in delivering.

"No, Charles," said she at last; "no, she pretended to love you dearly, but I could not believe in the fulness of her love since she subjected her affection to her rank and position. But let us not speak any more about that. You believe in her love, she believes in yours. I should wish to see you both happy and united."

"There is my own Mary again; my dear, old playmate!" exclaimed he, in raptures which she evidently did not share with him; she bowed her head, and stammered some inaudible words. "Did she ever reveal her name?" continued he. "Did she ever tell you where she lived? She must be ill, for I have not heard anything from her during the twenty-four hours that I have been free."

"She must be in the retinue of the Queen," replied Mary, in a low voice. "That is all I know."

"That is knowing a great deal, for now I am sure that it is not the Duchess of Portsmouth. I feared that, Mary; but now I am certain of the contrary. You are always my comforter, Mary, under any circumstances. You were and are my guide. May you continue to be so!"

"That is enough, Charles," whispered she.

"But you have hitherto only spoken about me, and although I have too much abused your permission, yet it was not for that reason that I came hither, Mary. Much of what seemed obscure to me has been cleared up already. You have most courageously braved the dangers that have threatened you, too courageously not to hold out until the end. You never were ambitious or aspiring; you always were too pious and pure to endeavour to obtain honour and position by means of

dishonour and shame. Why then, Mary, do you remain here? I understand that Lady Castlemaine brought you here under pretext of procuring the liberty of your father; but you know better by this time, you know that your father needs no more earthly help for his deliverance. Come with me. I will take you to Sir Henry, and under his safe conduct you will return to Hallam. I will take care of you as if you were my sister, and if I may see my eager desires carried out, if I may return to Hallam afterwards, we shall live there as one family, we shall go through life together, for she too will be your friend, nay, she must be your friend already since you have met. Leave this Court, and go with me."

"I cannot."

"Is it true then what I learned from Dickens, and what I would not believe? You remain here of your own accord? You stay here for the King's sake?"

"Yes."

"Yes? for the sake of a reprobate, a profligate?"

"He is the King, Charles. He is ordained by the Lord to be a chieftain and ruler over England, and if it be the Lord's will, he shall become a worthy one. Do not insist any longer, Charles. What I have to do here is an inspiration from God."

"But it is your disgrace, Mary. Oh, you are not sincere, it is a sinful passion that keeps you here, you whom I imagined to be above all passions. You love Charles Stuart; but no, that is impossible; you could no more love that man than you could love Buckingham. Is it your ambition, your desire to rule? Mary, that would humble you still more in my eyes. By the memory of your father, whom you loved and revered, I entreat you to turn back."

"I cannot yet. I must first do what my hand finds to do."

"But every moment's delay increases the danger. I will believe, Mary, that you have not succumbed in the struggle yet, but I cannot imagine that you will always have sufficient strength to resist. You cannot continue to govern the King without becoming what they were to him whom you have driven away."

"Do not torture me, Charles. God who searcheth the heart and reins, knows my weakness and strength, and He will not allow me to undertake anything above my power. I must remain. It is my dishonour, you say. Well, what matters the honour of a girl who belongs to nobody? The father has suffered, the daughter is not better than the father. The end of all earthly sufferings is reserved for all, beneath the green turf."

"Mary, that is the language of despair. Mary, why do you rush along the road to ruin? No, it cannot be from ambition."

"Let this end, Charles. You seem unable to understand me. You have so far forgotten the history of God's people as not even to remember what was once done by Judith."

"Surely you will not act as she did, and kill the chieftain?" exclaimed he, with horror.

"No," replied she, with a bitter smile, "I wish to make the King live."

"You mean to convert him—*him?* Do you not know then what he is? You hope to address him in the words of Jacob Hollis, and convert him? Mary, I cannot believe it. Once more, I beseech you to come

with me. You are lost if you remain. I hope I shall never see you back if you do remain."

"I must. Farewell then, Charles, friend of my youth, farewell then, for ever."

"Oh, Mary, you break my heart! Only one word, and you render me happy. Your disgrace is mine."

She gave him a sign with her hand to go. She had again turned her head aside, so that he merely noticed that appearance still betraying pride, or rather haughtiness, without perceiving the tears that gushed down those pale and quivering cheeks.

"Farewell then, farewell," said he, with suppressed voice.

He had proceeded only a few steps when he met the King, the man who was going to visit her whom he had just left. That wretch aimed at the fall of his sister. There was inward hatred in that glance as it met the King's, however deeply he bowed his head before the crowned head of England. The latter did not return his respectful salute, but passed him with a frown and a threat on his compressed lips. When Charles had reached the gate of the palace, he heard a confused noise of voices behind him, and a host of lackeys were seen rushing across the yard. He was informed by one of the underlings that Miss Hollis had been found senseless in her room, and that his Majesty had given orders to call for medical assistance immediately.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES AND STARTLING NEWS.

"WELL, man, that is confounded dear!" cried Sir Henry to the landlord of the inn, as the latter presented him at breakfast with the bill of the preceding day, and accompanied this proceeding by a deep bow and courteous gestures, but with an ironical smile on his face, as he glanced from the baronet to his two servants. Dickens was engaged in cutting the bread with a large knife, and the chaplain was looking after some of Sir Henry's clothes. The latter perceived and pointed out, with the greatest dismay, certain slits and holes, whilst he came mysteriously behind the Hollander in order to consult him about the mending.

"I can easily see how it is that you people are able to live in grand style, and keep a host of servants as if you were noblemen. The more gold on your sign-board, the higher the figures in your bill, is it not so? Every traveller is a goose that has to be plucked. But you will reckon without your host, man!"

"I assure you, sir, that I cannot charge more reasonable prices, at least if you want to be treated like a gentleman."

"Confound it! I should think I did; but never at those charges. Chaplain, did we ever sit down to a ten shilling dinner?"

The chaplain suddenly laid down the torn clothes of his master; he then looked seriously at him for a moment, after which he abruptly shook his head in denial.

"What then was it we paid? Speak out, you ought to know."

"It never came to more than two shillings for eight of us, but then we had fattened the calf or the pig ourselves, and her ladyship looked after the offal."

"I don't ask you that!" cried Sir Henry, who got enraged at the significant smile of the host, "I mean in our travels, you fool!"

"I shall have to find that out from my notebook," stammered the chaplain; "but that is upstairs at the top of the house, and at the bottom of my portmanteau."

"At Oxford, sir," interrupted the Hollander, as he calmly put down the knife and the bread, "at Oxford we paid twelve shillings when there were three of us, and here we are charged the same amount for four; my boy was with us yesterday."

"Confounded fool!" murmured the baronet, looking at Dickens as if he wished to devour him. But Dickens was not such a fool as he looked; he removed all the objections of Sir Henry, whose shabby economy compromised the honour of his house.

The landlord had by far the best of it. Sir Henry snatched the account from his hands, grumbling "that it was a swindle, and that the great metropolis was teeming with scoundrels in respectable attire;" and the host answered these civil remarks with a bow, after which he withdrew, expressing his hopes that he

might often still have the honour of presenting Sir Henry with a similar document, which could not but be a great honour to him and to his house.

As soon as the landlord had left, Sir Henry cried with the greatest indignation, "I believe, upon my soul, that that confounded fellow was poking fun at me." To this the Hollander nodded his assent, which increased, if possible, Sir Henry's rage and indignation. "Why, on earth, did I come to town? What am I doing here? for my own part your son might have drowned himself in a cask of beer. Just tell me now, Dickens, what business have we got here?"

"A good deal, for nothing has been done yet. Our Charles must come along with us; it is too expensive here, that you see yourself; and then we must take another one, but that will do later. Lastly, perhaps we do not know everything yet."

"You know more than you say, Dickens. Confess, old fellow! Who has told you? Not your boy? If so, I don't believe a word of it."

"No, no, not he; but I have a pair of eyes of my own; John is not quite an idiot—I am not yet behind everything, but there is more. What about that female who came yesterday?"

"She is a buxom woman, Dickens. I knew many like her in my youth; but that is all over now, and the boy must not think of her any more. I have lectured him severely on the subject, so has the chaplain, and the boy has promised to mend his ways. If all your troubles amount to this, it is nothing. Once more, what business have we got here?"

"Well, sir, first of all we are here for pleasure's sake, and then—since you are on such good terms

with the King—we'll go and speak to him about your lost estates. Meanwhile, sir, the darkness may clear up, sir, and we may get Charles away quietly."

"Let us go and see the churches," added the chaplain.

"Churches? you be buried in them!" grumbled Sir Henry. "To see churches, and to preach sermons, that's all you are thinking about; we shall do nothing of the sort."

There was, however, much in the Hollander's advice which did not seem to be thrown away upon the baronet, for after breakfast, of which Sir Henry partook enough for three, since he found that he had to pay treble, he dressed with the help of the chaplain, and went into town, accompanied by John as a guide; the latter had arrived at the inn with the message "that master would not be off duty till the afternoon." Dickens and the chaplain were allowed to go with the baronet. John very modestly made the observation that "it would be expedient to order a hackney-coach, since it did not become a gentleman to go through London on foot, especially not a gentleman so richly dressed, and with so numerous a suite as Sir Henry." In reality, the kind-hearted young fellow dreaded the ridicule of the London mob, from which he desired to save them all. At first Sir Henry seemed willing to yield, but when he began to haggle about the fare, the driver laid the whip over the most prominent ribs of his animal, and added, "You take my advice, man, and get yourself a donkey-cart."

"They are all impudent brutes, here!" exclaimed the baronet, and he proceeded on his way with the solemn declaration that "Not a single driver would get a penny fare out of him."

The ridicule which John had been so anxious to avoid was very soon incurred. The first thing to attract attention was the once costly but now somewhat faded costume of Sir Henry, dating from the time of the royal martyr, and after this the droll appearance of the two attendants, more especially that of the chaplain, whose head was turning in such a crowd. In his anxiety to avoid jostling against one person he trod on the toes of another; in his desire to get out of the way of a spring-cart, he fell over the basket of an orangewoman, and set her wares tumbling and rolling along the muddy pavement. There was no lack of opprobrious epithets, and these might have been followed by a more substantial reward had not Dickens taken him by the arm. Everything went on swimmingly for awhile until the reverend gentleman, who had by this time recovered a sufficient amount of calmness, and who began to look round, admiring in his simplicity all the new and strange things he saw, was suddenly struck by the aspect of a splendid house with large windows, exhibiting books and engravings.

"Dickens, one moment—let us have a look. An entirely new edition of the 'Seven Champions,' I believe—with cuts."

Dickens, desirous of gratifying his companion's curiosity, crossed the street, and stayed to look for a moment at the valuable books; but when they turned round they saw neither Sir Henry nor their guide. Wherever they directed their eyes they could nowhere catch sight of them. Whether they had proceeded along the street, or whether they had turned a corner, remained a mystery; and the chaplain proposed in his despair that they should wait in front of some shop

until Sir Henry returned with John. The Hollander, although by no means at ease in such a crowded and busy place, could not help smiling at this original idea of the reverend gentleman, who had evidently forgotten that there were more streets than one in London.

"We can easily ask our way, and must endeavour to find it; now that we are out for a holiday, Mr. King, we shall do wisely to enjoy it." So saying, Dickens, with a familiarity that utterly surprised the chaplain, accosted one of the passers-by, and asked the way to one of the parks. The information given was as lucid as usual. "The second turning to the right, and the third to the left, until you come to a large tavern;" all that Dickens could remember were the last words, "and then ask again." They had scarcely gone a few steps when they were tapped on their shoulders, and greeted by a hoarse voice and loud laughter, emanating from our old acquaintance Dick Wharton.

"Hallo! you in town, gentlemen? and all by yourselves, like a tom-cat watching his prey. How are you, reverend sir? and you, my honourable friend?"

"We are all right, as you see," replied the Hollander, who did not wish to stop, and who was, moreover, hurried on by Mr. King, the latter evidently preferring to go astray with the honest Dutchman to being brought back by Dick Wharton.

We have not said anything for a long time of the worthy *protégé* of the Duke of Buckingham, and that is because we had no new exploits to tell of him. Not that he had retired from business, for from that he would have been prevented by his estimable master,

to whom he was so indispensable, but because his quiet little jobs do not fall within the circle of our tale. He had at first, and for a long time, been uneasy about the consequences of a deed which might cost him his head, but gradually his tender conscience had been lulled to sleep, and he had begun to suppose that the deed was forgotten because he heard no more about it. And now he was suddenly reminded of it by the sight of the two strangers who had taken up so much of the public attention, and in whom he had recognised our two Hallamites. "Why had they left their cursed hamlet? what had they come to London for?—not, he hoped, to be evidence in an affair which he imagined to be buried in oblivion." He wanted to find out, in order the better to secure his safety, and that is why he had accosted them in his usual jocose way.

"Will you allow me to be your guide, noble sirs?" asked he courteously, and Mr. King immediately accepted. Dickens, however, was of a different opinion, and remarked, in his wonted dry manner, "That Mr. Wharton had never proved a good guide yet." Mr. Wharton found much more meaning in these words than they really were intended to convey, for he detected in them an allusion to the unpleasant affair we know of, and was the more anxious therefore to find out the true facts.

"I will show you what a good guide I can be," replied he. "You want to go to St. James's Park, but you are going in the wrong direction altogether. You ought to have kept to the left."

Although hesitatingly, they both followed Mr. Wharton's direction.

"Has Sir Henry come with you, Mr. King?"

The answer of course was in the affirmative.

"Has the young gentleman been going it?" asked he further, with a knowing air.

"I am sorry to say yes. Oh, that we could all be back in Hallam," sighed the chaplain; but the Hollander continued—

"In fact, we are here for quite a different purpose, do you see? We are on the track of that girl who was carried off, and that track we are following."

"By this way?" asked Dick, who endeavoured to smile, but who could not help betraying his anxiety when he observed how the Dutchman kept staring at him.

"Why not? If a thing is to be discovered—— do you see? Murder will out."

"Confounded clodhopper!" muttered Dick.

"You did not stay very long after her abduction," continued Dickens.

"You know, of course, that a good servant follows immediately behind his master. Once more to the left, governor."

"The servant might fare ill one day who follows his master everywhere, do you see?"

"No, I don't see anything, and I beg that you will explain yourself. Do you think that it was I who carried off the lass? She was certainly worth the trouble, but I feel sure that she went out on business on her own account."

These words were acknowledged by Dickens with a good blow in the face. "Evil meets with evil," said the phlegmatic Hollander, whilst Dick put one hand on the injured part of his face, and brought the other to the hilt of his rapier.

"Why, you old night-owls, why don't you stick to your church-towers? What prevents me—— But no, I am the guilty one. Let us be good friends again."

"Again? We never were good friends," replied the other.

"Tell him that Mary is staying at Whitehall—that will make him more civil, and then he will conduct us by another way; I do not like this place at all, Mr. Dickens. Only tell him that you are his friend," murmured Mr. King.

"Not a word about it; the blackguard would escape, but still I do not like this place either."

"Now to the right, gentlemen; that will prove the shortest way, if not the best. Behind lies St. James's Park, where a review of the Life Guards is now going on. We must be quick."

He took one arm of each in a familiar manner. Dickens had first made up his mind not to follow the guide's directions, but he too followed after all, although slower, and occasionally looking very suspiciously at Dick Wharton, whose face became more and more repulsive. Well might the good chaplain say that he did not like the look of this neighbourhood. The street, or rather court, in which they found themselves by this time, was so narrow that they, going three abreast, took up the whole breadth of it. The pavement was filthy and altogether in a most wretched condition; the miserable houses on both sides tottered and trembled like a man drunk with wine. From time immemorial the little windows had not known any glass, but merely oiled paper, which was anything but a satisfactory substitute. The doors were either conspicuous through their absence, or they were hanging loose and awry

on their hinges, and from the houses themselves issued offensive vapours. It might have been called twilight here, although it was noon everywhere else. Here and there a dripping tallow candle between the chinks of the rotten doors or the opening of some of the windows showed either a dishevelled head, a pair of flaming eyes, or a dry, sallow, and emaciated face.

"Whitefriars! Whitefriars! run!" suddenly exclaimed Dick Wharton, attempting to escape himself. But the phlegmatic Dutchman, who had been suspicious from the very beginning, although wavering until now, had watched all the movements of their guide, and collared Mr. Wharton with his strong grip just as he was about to make his exit. The ragged inhabitants looked and rushed out from every house. Here, one with a wooden leg; there, another maimed or disabled figure, in addition to many a strong and able-bodied man, whose sallow complexion and restless looks were ample evidence for supposing that he was not less inwardly injured than the others were outwardly.

"Welcome, gentlemen!" shouted the league of bankrupts, thieves and murderers, who had fled here from the avenging arm of justice, to live their lives of misery and squalor. "Welcome, gentlemen," cried they, at the top of their voices, and above all these sounded the shrill diabolical laughter of some half-intoxicated, half-idiotic women, who, with dishevelled hair, were leaning on their dry and unwashed arms in the windows of the upper stories, to enjoy the fright and embarrassment of the poor country people who had lost their way in this disreputable part of the city.

The chaplain presented, of course, the very picture of terror and dismay, but—be it said to his honour—

his fright arose less from fear for his own person, than from the horror which he had of his awful surrroundings. He buried his face against the walls, not to witness the scene, and would have willingly shut both his ears, had he not followed the Hollander's example in collaring Mr. Wharton, who was thus a prisoner between the chaplain and the Dutchman.

"Pay your footing, gentlemen! pay your footing!" cried the hoarse voice of a cripple who had just emptied the last drop of a bottle, and who now flung it at the head of the three new comers.

"You have brought us into this hole, and you shall get us out of it." Thus spoke the resolute Hollander to his treacherous guide.

"Pluck the geese, old chums," cried the latter, making another effort to escape from the Dutchman's grasp. "Pluck them; I have brought them here for old friendship's sake! Don't you spare them."

"Do you know what that is, vile sneak?" whispered Dickens, producing a pruning-knife, which he always carried about him. "Before they touch the chaplain and myself, I'll have you."

"We are strangers," cried he, to the approaching multitude; "we have come to see all about London. How much is there to pay?"

Some of the most active and experienced hands had been searching already the pockets of Mr. King, but as they were empty, the thieves had merely torn his clerical undergarb. With the assistance of a few other friends they were just going to unbutton his coat, when Dickens moved the chaplain aside, and with incredible strength pushed Dick Wharton in his place,

and in front of them: "By my soul and salvation!"* cried he, into the traitor's ear, "I'll stab you through and through if you do not empty your purse before them, coin after coin," and as Wharton did not immediately comply with this request, he was made to feel the cold steel on his neck. Mr. Wharton at last pulled out his purse, and all the coins, golden ones included, were thrown in the opposite direction from that which our trio had come; of course the whole gang began to concentrate on that particular spot; even those who had posted themselves at the entrance were unwilling to lose their chance, and rushed past the welcome visitors. The few that remained outside of the ring of the scuffle were pushed aside by Dick Wharton, as well as by the others, for the guide was now very glad to get out of the maze into which he had led the others from a feeling of revenge.

As soon as the three were seen making their escape they were eagerly pursued by the enemy. There was a deafening hissing and whistling, a shower of clods, bricks, and other missiles; but the flying party was near the terminus of the privileged domain, in another street, where the London constables always kept a watchful eye to see that none of the "Alsatian gentry" ventured beyond their own territory without being arrested. The extraordinary noise, which, for the last ten minutes, had emanated from the illustrious abode, had caused a mob of other people to gather in front, and among them a squad of constables. The latter put their heads forward in eager expectation, as soon

* A common but vulgar ejaculation in Dutch.

as they saw the three men approach, one of whom seemed to be a prisoner of the two others.

"The Lord God be praised!" exclaimed the chaplain, who looked ludicrous enough minus his coat and with his half-unbuttoned waistcoat.

"Gentlemen," cried Dickens, still armed with his pruning-knife, "this is the villain who brought us into that wasp's nest. His name is Dick Wharton, and he is the besom with which his Grace of Buckingham is wont to sweep his dirty course. Look at him well, and be on your guard. Now get you gone, you blackguard."

"I beg your pardon," said one of the constables. "Dick Wharton, in the name of his Majesty, you are my prisoner."

He had been wanted since the morning, but could not be found. As he was being looked after without the Duke of Buckingham's knowledge, it had been impossible to get any information about him at his Grace's palace. The prisoner of late had kept very modestly in the background, and the administrators of justice, who were most anxious to secure him before the recovery of his high-born patron, had almost despaired of capturing him in time. As it was, Dick Wharton, in his amiable endeavours to oblige his Hallam friends, had lost both his money and his liberty.

Of course neither Dickens nor the completely exhausted chaplain thought for a moment of continuing their proposed sight-seeing. The latter had not a single coin with him, and the Hollander but few, so that the hire of a hackney-coach was entirely out of the question for them. After much asking and wan-

dering they arrived at last at their inn, which they welcomed as the thirsty Arab does a fountain in the desert; but alas! after all their peregrinations, not even a moment's rest was in store for them. They found Sir Henry here under circumstances somewhat different from those under which they had left him.

The last we saw of the worthy baronet was when he was walking with John as his guide. Sir Henry had so many questions to ask, so much to admire and to gaze at, in everything that had changed during the last ten years, that he never noticed the absence of the two others until some time after. When, however, something attracted his attention, about which he wished to consult his Dutch friend, he looked around, and, still thinking that he was following immediately behind, he addressed a perfect stranger, who, it appeared now, had taken the place of his two servants. He waited for a while; he went back even, but every trace of them was lost.

"What confounded slow coaches," exclaimed he. "They may creep, if they please; they must get home in the end." With these consolatory remarks he continued his walk with John. After some time he stopped before a house with a double balcony, which, according to John's information, was the club of the young squire, where he went every day, and where the greatest nobles met.

"I should like to see such a thing," said Sir Henry, peeping through the windows of the large building.

"Well, sir, I suppose you will be allowed to pass in young master's name. I'll wait for you at the door-steps, sir."

Sir Henry could not resist the temptation, and went

in. At first he felt a little giddy from the oppressive atmosphere that surrounded him, but very soon he began to gaze with evident satisfaction upon that motley, teeming, shouting, and laughing crowd. If Sir Henry had hoped for a moment to find Charles there, but he was disappointed. He had at first some difficulty in piercing the crowd, but as soon as he had passed the first circles, the others appeared quite willing to give way. The fact was that everyone got out of the way in order to have a better opportunity of inspecting the strange visitor in his old-fashioned costume, with his boorish appearance and heavy step.

He heard several whispers going round, and observed a smile on everybody's face; his appearance caused every conversation suddenly to be stopped, and the cards even to be laid down. Still the jovial old fellow had not the remotest idea that his person was the cause of all, and that he was the subject under discussion. Finally, when he reached the end of the large room he was accosted by a lackey in elegant livery, whom he took to be a nobleman of high rank, and whose deep bow he therefore returned in a similar manner.

"May I know your name, sir, and that of the gentleman who has introduced you?"

"Of course you may. I am Sir Henry Digby, of Hallam; and my son Charles is well known here, I presume?"

"Certainly, Sir Henry," said one of the nobles, who at once stepped forward as he heard the name. "We consider it a great honour to receive a visit from the parent of our noble and gallant friend. We are all Charles's friends, but I, more especially, Sir Henry."

"And your name, Sir."

"Lord Chester."

"My boy has never mentioned your name to me; however, God bless you, my lord!"

He found himself suddenly in the midst of a thronged circle, and many pressed his hands.

"You have a brave son, Sir Henry! He has defeated the first swordsman of his time."

Sir Henry's breast was swelling with pride.

"Is he not in high favour with his Majesty, who knows how to appreciate courage?" asked he, quite confidentially, of the man who appeared to be so much his son's friend.

"That you may imagine; especially now," said a young man who had hitherto kept himself in the background, but who now put his head between the others, and smiled sarcastically.

"Why do you say, especially now?" asked Sir Henry.

"Do you come from Hallam, and don't you know it is a godsend for the whole family, old man?"

"What is a godsend? that Charles has been in prison, and that——."

"Certainly— that he was saved by her."

"By whom the deuce do you mean?"

"Well, by the friend of the family; I congratulate you, old man."

"Old man! old man! Who, pray, are you, youngster?" asked Sir Henry, slightly vexed.

"John Scott, Duke of Monmouth," said the other, artfully.

The old baronet was beside himself. "I am happy to make your acquaintance. Is not your Grace also

a friend of my son's? But who is the lady friend your Grace was speaking of?"

"As if you did not know her! as if you have not proved your good scent by coming here at this moment! I hear she is perfectly lovely, that Roundhead girl. Come, sir, do not lose your temper; she will make you happy enough, more so, I presume, than she ever would have done at Hallam!" cried Harry.

The spectators laughed, and Sir Henry, who began to smell a rat, would fain have blushed if he could have done so with his naturally ruddy cheeks. "You are speaking of Mary—of our Mary? Is she——"

"Of course; don't you have your game with us;" said one among them, as he tapped him on his shoulder in a very familiar manner. "She will put a few guineas into your exchequer; but keep that well closed, and carefully out of reach of a certain young gentleman with whom you are closely connected. Do you care for a game of basset? Only not after the fashion of your intimate connexion," said Sidney, who was more cutting than his friend Harry, and who, after his last interview with Charles, had abandoned all hope and desire of admitting him again into the circle of his intimate companions.

Sir Henry, who understood more of Sidney's hints than the latter could suspect, felt his blood boil, and could hardly restrain his desire of treating the impudent nobleman to a box on the ear.

"What was the manner," asked he, "in which Charles used to play it sometimes?"

"Ask Lord Buckingham, if you like. Well, do you stake a hundred louis d'or?"

"No, thank you. In my youth we were better up in fighting than in gambling; I feel confident that in the latter occupation I should not equal the noblemen of the period. But then," exclaimed he, with an angry look upon the rolls of gold that were exhibited on the various tables, "but then in my time there were a good deal more crowns in the coffer than there are now pence in the purse."

"My good old friend!" cried Harry, now in a tone of familiarity which annoyed the Baronet, "you give it him as much as you like, only pay for him afterwards."

"Why, he does not know anything yet—— "

"Leave him in his charming Eden! The cherub with the flaming sword will appear soon enough."

"I should like to know who dares to insult me here?" asked Sir Henry, who felt annoyed by insinuations which he did not understand.

"Nobody will dare, Sir Henry of Hallam. We know your ancient family, and we believe in your new influence," said Harry, with a serio-comic bow.

"Very well, but whom do you mean by the cherub? That's what I should like to know!"

"That too the Duke of Buckingham would be able to tell you; a pity it is that he is not quite recovered yet."

The idea dawned upon Sir Henry that he might go and see the Duke of Buckingham, however much he disliked the idea; Charles evidently had not told him all he wished to know.

He knew that the boy had been charged with playing false, but that he did not believe, in spite of all those covert insinuations. Yet, could Charles have incurred debts, could he owe any money to that pro-

fligate? He had asked him about that casually, but he could not remember what answer he had received. He was determined to find it out, and after having emptied the glass which had been presented to him in the name of the whole club, after having politely declined "the honour of spending a few minutes more with them," he withdrew, being accompanied as far as the doorsteps by many of them, who assured the droll old man of their sincere attachment.

"They should campaign those fair-weather Jacks!" murmured he on his way to Buckingham Palace. "The earth should be their couch, and a tent their dwelling-place, those idling youngsters, who gamble away the whole of their estate, and who, I presume, have ruined my boy." At this idea he quickened his steps, so much so, that John could not keep up with him.

"I am sure, sir, that his Grace will not receive you. Had we not better look for father and the chaplain?" asked young Dickens, who was not quite at ease since the disappearance of the two others.

"They'll take care of themselves. There's no fear of their being drowned, and they have each got a tongue in their head wherewith to ask—— He, not receive me? we'll see about that."

Indeed, John's fear was ill-founded in this respect. After having extended an admiring gaze over the magnificent palace, compared to which Hallam Castle was a small farm-house; after having shaken his head at the vexing idea how rich that favourite must be; after having waited for a moment in the splendid vestibule, he was informed by the steward that his Grace was willing to grant him an in-

terview. The tone in which the servant addressed him was annoying to Sir Henry, and, with his wonted frankness, he might have resented it, had he not been completely under the impression of all the surrounding luxury and grandeur.

"His Grace is still weak, and is not allowed to speak much," said the steward, ceremoniously, as he opened the door of the bedchamber and beckoned him with a sign, almost of command, to enter the room.

Yes, that was surely the face of Mr. George, his jovial guest of yore; only it was rather paler and more worn. The greatest difference was presented by the costume. The patient had wrapped himself in a red velvet cloak, tied round his waist by a cord with golden tassels. He was stretched on an elegant couch; before him stood a small table, and quite within his reach were a few crystal decanters filled with Cyprus and other choice wines. The heavy silk damask curtains allowed only a dim light to pierce the stained windows. Underneath the white mantelpiece of elaborately carved marble blazed a cheerful open fire, whilst the gaudiest feathered birds, of which Sir Henry had never dreamt, were sporting and chirping and wooing among the rarest exotic plants, enclosed by a net of copper wire, so that the ear and the eye were both agreeably, sometimes disagreeably, surprised.

"Welcome to London, my noble and liberal host!" cried Buckingham to Sir Henry. He did not change his nonchalant posture in any way, but pointed to one of the chairs as a sign for him to sit down. "Before you speak to me a single word, I must thank you for the interest you show in me, although I had some right to expect it. I hope Lady Digby is well, and

continues to be the same busy, respectable housewife."

That word of housewife spoiled the whole of the pretty speech in Sir Henry's estimation. He nodded, but did not speak; he felt that he could not speak.

"And so you have come to London to see me. Well, that is very kind; just what I should have expected from a Digby. Glass of wine, sir?——I am sorry that I have not got any beer, because I know that that is your favourite drink."

"I thought Mr. George liked it as well," said he, not without difficulty; there was something in his Grace's tone which Sir Henry disliked. Was it his consciousness that he was speaking now with the Duke of Buckingham? He could not tell. Mr. George had also been familiar,—very familiar,—but he had listened to him without feeling annoyed. "Certainly I liked beer——that is to say at Hallam Castle; however, Sir Henry, a glass of wine?"

"No, I thank you."

"Why, man! how abrupt you are! And we used to be on such good terms together. I thought you would have been delighted to find in your friend George another friend of whom you always knew so much good. You may imagine how happy and flattered I felt when you were so eloquent and enthusiastic in your praises of the Duke of Buckingham. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Your Grace seems to be recovered," remarked Sir Henry, who commenced moving backwards and forwards on his chair, and almost wished that he had broken one of his legs before he crossed the threshold of the palace.

"Yes, I should almost be able to make another trip to Hallam, it is so pleasantly situated. You know what I promised you, and your charming son would no doubt be with us. What a pity that that is all the offspring you have got!"

"And that I have found that one alive is certainly not your fault," said Sir Henry, who could repress his anger no longer, and who did not perceive until now how he and his family were ridiculed by that "rattling skeleton," as he called the invalid within himself.

"And that I have not lost my precious life, that is certainly not his fault," replied the Duke, laughing. "Whatever you may have omitted to teach him it is not fencing. You should send him to America; he might become a butcher among the savages."

The praise which Sir Henry gathered from the first part of the sentence, was counterbalanced by the insult conveyed by the concluding words. His blood was boiling, and he cried with a hoarse voice, "Confound it! that is just why he must stay here."

"Very good; yes, there are plenty of savages here, and therefore he has not much chance of exercising the noble profession for a very long time."

"What do you mean by those words?"

"Why, my noble host, it is a mere warning. Old man, take the chicken under your own wings, or else it will never come to anything. If you had another one, I should say, cast it out of the nest, they are a bad brood!

"That's a falsehood! Charles has behaved like a true gentleman. But I can forgive you; you have had the worst of it."

"You speak of it as of a common street row, and

one of us was too highly placed for that," replied his Grace, haughtily. "He has behaved like a gentleman. That is true; I can imagine how my lady must have received the news. Your son is a fine fellow, not only at the gaming-table, but also in the streets after midnight. My good sir, how much has the education of the gallant knight cost you?"

"Not much, because there was a good deal in him. Others may have had heaps of money wasted upon them, and all in vain. The son may be a little exhausted now, my lord duke, but the father is still fresh! He will wait until you have quite recovered."

"Calm yourself, my good and estimable friend!"

"I am not your friend, for I am an honest man and a gentleman!"

"We will proceed to put that to the test, my worthy host, if you will not allow me to call you friend. By the side of your son's numerous triumphs he sustained one defeat. It is a pity for his name, but he braved fortune, and she is as capricious as a woman. He owes me about a thousand guineas; you are an honest man and a gentleman, and I am glad to hear it. The son may be unable to pay, but the honest father will."

"A thousand guineas!" sighed Sir Henry; "a thousand!"

"Or thereabouts," corrected the other, carelessly.

"But that cannot be through fair dealings."

"Quite possible; the young one may not be so honest as the old one."

"My lord duke!" exclaimed Sir Henry, stamping his foot and thumping his fist on the table, so that everything on it shook. The duke looked at him with surprise, but still with the same sarcastic smile on his

lips. It was as if Sir Henry felt that he was no match for such cold scorn; he bowed his head and whispered, "No, that cannot be true; he cannot have played false."

"I never said so, Sir Henry, only you hinted at it yourself when you spoke of unfair dealings, in connexion of course with your son. Why is it that you look so depressed now? I am not afraid of my money, but I suspect something. Did you come here to square up accounts? then everything can be arranged *sub rosa*."

"I shan't pay a farthing!" thundered Sir Henry; "not a farthing! Is that the way you were to take care of him? You have been his demon, and the evil star of the son has been lodged and fed by the father. Oh, that my beer had turned into vinegar, and my household bread into stone! I shan't pay a penny; not a farthing!"

"And you are an honest man and a gentleman! Look here, sir! since you remind me of all the benefits you have bestowed upon me, I am quite willing to pay for them; Buckingham always pays double. Sir, your son owes me twelve hundred guineas; I deduct two hundred; that's no bad pay, I think, for my board and lodging. Hush! don't make any objection," continued he more haughtily: "you won't pay a farthing? Very well; I will not send you the sheriff's officer to demand payment, but you may go and shut yourself up with your youngster in your delightful Hallam Castle; there you will not dare to face any gentleman, for they will all turn their backs upon you. One and all shall know that you are not an honest man nor a gentleman, and that you and your

son resemble each other in this one point—that you are both willing to pocket the guineas when you gain, but very loth to repay what you have lost. You may go, sir."

"That shall never be said!" cried Sir Henry, who was at last allowed to speak. He had become so red in the face that Buckingham dreaded a fit of apoplexy. "But still I will not pay; I will inform his Majesty that you have made another victim, Duke of Buckingham, and the King will hear me, and so will Mary Hollis—you know the lass you caused to be carried off; it's known all over London!—she too will speak a word in the matter, and we shall see upon whom the English nobility will turn its back. Confound it! that's what nobody ever ventured to tell me yet, let alone an individual who has got such an account of sin, that there would still remain a margin if one good deed could strike out a dozen rascally tricks."

The Duke of Buckingham stretched himself at full length, and began to yawn more and more as the other lost his temper.

"Show that man out, but first pay him two hundred guineas. I wish to pay *my* debts." He made a sign for Sir Henry to leave, and the latter, whose indignation was increased by the insulting offer of payment, could hardly find words to speak.

"I do not want your money!" uttered he with difficulty, after which he left.

On their way back to the inn, John could hardly keep up with the hurrying, trembling, muttering, excited baronet. Inferring from a few incoherent words that it was all about his young master, John, as a

faithful servant, endeavoured to bring forward some of Charles's good points, but he had not got further than the introduction, when a voice of command thundered "silence" into his ear.

"Where is Charles?" asked Sir Henry of the first person he came across at the inn; but no answer ensued, as nobody knew who Charles was. The old man gave himself no time for an explanation, but rushed upstairs, and there sank down with his exhausted limbs into an arm-chair.

"Shall I fetch a doctor, sir?" said the faithful John.

"Silence!" thundered the same voice of command. "Send for Charles at once; do you hear?"

The kind-hearted lad did not know where to find his master; he went away, but it was to order a mug of ale, which he brought up in a few minutes' time. Here a familiar footstep was heard to ascend the stairs. It was Charles, who entered and approached his father with assumed cheerfulness.

"Now I am free for the whole day. Shall we go this evening to Covent Garden?"

"To Covent Garden? To Coventry you'll have to go, young scamp!" cried Sir Henry, "unworthy offspring of the noble Digbys—blackleg."

"Father," stammered Charles, as he felt Sir Henry's iron grasp upon his breast.

"Take me at once to the King. The Stuarts are under obligations to the Digbys. This is the right time to come down with a trifle. Take me to the King."

"He is not to be seen now. Not now. He is in a bad humour."

"Then to Mary; for she must help us to have our revenge on that blackguard Buckingham. Don't you

pretend not to understand me. Don't look at me any longer with those deceitful eyes. I have seen Buckingham. Do you understand me now? Do you owe him money—yes or no?" and he kept shaking him all the time.

"I do, father; but I do not want to be asked in such a manner. I am no longer to be chastised like a child, father," said Charles, as he loosened himself, and moved a step backward.

"You are no longer a child! You are a young urchin that ought not to be allowed a penny in his pocket! A felon that ought to be imprisoned! A curse to your parents, do you hear, that ought to be cast out of the family." In his mad rage he was going to throw the tin tankard into the face of his only child, whilst his eye looked round for some instrument of chastisement.

In the midst of this dreadful scene of unnatural conflict Dickens entered with the chaplain. Both forgot the fatigue and anxiety they had gone through, at the sight of the threatening features of the raving parent. Dickens saw the danger. He was not aware of the cause of the quarrel, but he had the courage to snatch the tankard from the trembling hands of his master, and to rebuke him: "Calm yourself, sir! it is Charles, your only child!"

Dickens was exceptionally possessed of an eloquence which never failed to make an impression upon the kind-hearted, though eccentric baronet. These words, "only child," and the calm courage with which he arrested the arm of the enraged father, actually caused the latter to recover his temper a little. He gave up the tankard willingly, and allowed himself to be put

down upon a chair by the faithful Dutchman. The chaplain had not dared to open his mouth, but he had been active nevertheless.

In his fear that Sir Henry might carry out his threat, and throw the tankard, or a chair, or some other missile at Charles's head, he had placed himself right in front of his beloved pupil, to shelter him with his own body from every intended attack.

Sir Henry began by informing Dickens of the discovery he had made, of his conversation with the villain to whom that scamp—he would not call Charles by his name yet—owed more than twelve hundred guineas. Dickens and the chaplain both looked aghast at the mention of such a sum.

"But I must see the King. I must go and see Mary, and she will——"

"No, father, I beseech you not to do that! Buckingham shall be paid, but not through Mary, father. I will pay him, I that have incurred the debt."

"Hear that confounded braggart," cried Sir Henry, whilst he looked at his Dutch friend; "for the last fortnight he has not seen the colour of his Majesty's coin, and he undertakes to pay twelve hundred guineas —curses upon that Buckingham!"

"I will go to the Continent, father, and solicit a commission in the foreign troops of the Dutch Republic. If I die, Buckingham has lost all claims upon me; if I do not, I shall at some time be able to pay him. Therefore, no more words, Sir Henry."

"Charles," whispered the chaplain, "'Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long——'"

"Does not the rascal speak as if he were the offended party, Dickens? He talks as if he had de-

feated Cromwell. Talking about going to the Continent, about life and death, just as if he were the child of a Jew or an infidel; as if he had nothing on earth that he cared for, or—confound it!—that he ought to care for, at all events. Oh, Dickens! is not he a regular scamp? The Continent! oh, my God!"

The old man covered his face with both his hands, and the big warm tears ran along his trembling fingers. That man, who pretended to possess a heart of stone and iron, was full of human and tender feelings.

Charles, who would not have bowed before his father's strength, yielded to his weakness. No sooner did he perceive those tears running for his sake, than he rushed towards his parent, fell down at his feet, uncovered the old man's face that he might be able to grasp his hands, and stammered, "My dear old father! I would not willingly cause you that grief; but, pardon me, I must go and atone for what I have done. Do you imagine, father, that our parting is not painful to me?"

"Charles, my lad, why had you ever any dealings with that scoundrel? Dickens, I will fight the miscreant. Charles, you shall not go abroad."

"He must go," said Dickens.

"He must? he must?—be turned out of doors like a dog?" cried Sir Henry.

"To fight the Duke is no good. He may fall, but so may you, and in either case the debt remains, do you see?"

"Father, allow me to carry out my intention. It is by far the best. I must take leave of somebody—and then——"

"And then you will leave me and your mother alone, whilst you will be thrown upon the wide, wide world. Dickens, I cannot let him go."

"Nor is it absolutely necessary that he should."

"Why? Do you know of anything? You always do. Out with it, old fellow."

"You pay, do you see?"

"Confound it! that I know as well as you do," cried Sir Henry, not a little disappointed. "I pay? Twelve hundred guineas! Wherewith, you blockhead?"

"With your own money, that must hereafter become his. To borrow from others, as long as we can manage to get it together by our own efforts, is disgraceful. 'He that pays his debts is never the poorer for that,' we say in Holland; to fight a man because he is your creditor is unmanly and dishonest; to grumble and to mourn where you can help yourself, is perfectly childish."

"Dickens! are you mad?" cried Sir Henry.

"It is not I that am mad, sir! Hallam estate is worth about fifteen thousand pounds, and on that we can raise nearly one thousand. Then we must set about a-sowing and a-ploughing, and, if it be God's will, our harvest will be abundant, and that will pay the thousand off again. By so doing, every one will remain an honest man; none of those flunkey-looking fops, of whom I have seen only too many, will be able to say a word, and that scoundrel Buckingham shall not have the pleasure of bragging that he has driven a Digby out of the country. That is my idea, do you see?"

"Dickens, my good Dickens, no, that will not do!" exclaimed Charles. "Never will I be the cause of my parents' penury! No, I have incurred the debt, and nobody else shall discharge it."

"Gently, young man. So you shall, don't you

fear. Your idling life must come to an end. Now then, sir," continued he, addressing Sir Henry: "make up your mind like a man, one way or the other."

"But your mother, Charles?" sighed the old man.

"What's done can't be helped. Her ladyship is well aware of that. One way or the other, sir: either Charles must go to the continent to be killed in battle, or he must come back to Hallam; which do you prefer?"

"Dickens, he must return to Hallam with us—— even if I were to lose the last of my teeth on a crust of hard, stale bread. Dickens, arrange matters accordingly."

Charles had been very reckless, but his punishment was adequate to his misdemeanour. The whole conversation had been so utterly painful to him that he had often wished not to outlive the evening of that day. He had impoverished his father and his mother, he, the son, whose duty should have been to enrich them.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME POLITICS.

LADY CASTLEMAINE and the Duchess of Portsmouth had been in exile for some time. The Court, on recovering from its first surprise and amazement, had unanimously come to the conclusion that Miss Hollis was playing a dangerous game, which she was sure to lose sooner or later. But as the days elapsed, and neither of the once so powerful mistresses was seen to return to Court,—as the rumour began to be whispered about, that the Frenchwoman had left for Versailles, and that the other was to be escorted to her indulgent husband,—then the incredible was believed, and the impossible held to be possible. Numerous efforts were made to penetrate into the sanctuary of the mighty fairy princess who had, so to speak, metamophosed creation; but everyone was denied admittance as before. The only one, except the King, who was successful, was the Earl of Shaftesbury. No wonder that the rising statesman was overburdened with petitions, and looked upon as the head of the cabinet. As Shaftesbury, however, did not betray anything either, some went so far as to court the favours of old Kate. Evil tongues reported that even the Duke of Monmouth, who was becoming rather afraid

lest his relationship towards the King should no longer screen him, had been actually surprised in a confidential *tête-à-tête* with the old hag, whereat she had remained as silent and mysterious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

Everyone indeed protested against the influence of the new ruler, yet everyone submitted to her sway. The life at Court, once so merry and enjoyable, had become intolerably dull. Scripture texts, which none but the elder courtiers could remember from the days of Cromwell, had now to be raked up from the bottom of their youthful memories; for—*incredible!*—Charles Stuart had turned pious. The room was closed that had witnessed so many merry revels, such splendid ballets in imitation of those of Versailles; so was the elegant saloon where the golden coins used to roll over the small green tables, and another, the most luxurious of all, Charles Stuart's *sanctum sanctorum* where none but his most intimate friends used to be admitted. On the other hand, his Majesty's closet was always open: here the Secretaries of State might be seen going in and out, whilst nothing was discussed but matters of politics; the parliamentary debates were watched with feigned interest, and the demands for new subsidies, now defended by Lord Shaftesbury, were continually being discussed, with all their probable chances of success. Of all the Secretaries of State—not excepting Lord Clifford, who had to lay the accounts before Parliament, and to listen to all the respectful observations of an anything but respectful assembly—he had the most arduous task to fulfil. He was compelled to undo his own work; his duty was, if possible, to annul the secret treaty of Dover, and to renew the alliance with

the Republic. His Highness the Prince of Orange, was more amiable than ever; he overwhelmed his lordship with friendly calls, and never failed to inform him that he had always spoken very highly of his lordship to his royal uncle, whom he was now in the habit of visiting almost daily. The latter circumstance was, by this time, generally known. The King had even gone so far as to declare openly that he liked working with his young nephew, who had an insight into public affairs which was far above his years. Already the sum had been stipulated that was to be paid to his Highness, as soon as Parliament should have authorised the new supplies.

Chevalier Boreel, who was himself surprised that he should succeed where M. van Beuningen had failed, was grievously disappointed to see that he did not receive from the States that support upon which he fairly thought he might have relied. At the Hague they seemed very unwilling to believe in the sincerity of the cabinet of St. James's, however convincing might be the proofs received by the States' ambassador. At the same time, the last letter had insisted upon the speedy return of his Highness: "it became absolutely necessary for him to attend the meetings of the State Council, so that he might fulfil the wishes of the people by gradually becoming acquainted with the affairs of the country."

"An invitation for your Highness to return," said Boreel, as he handed that letter to the Prince.

"An order, my friend," answered his Highness; "and I shall have to obey it, unless I would lose at the Hague all I have gained here."

However, the sacrifice which he was called upon to

make was not so very great. Boreel could easily do what still remained to be done. The rupture between France and England, and the alliance between the latter power and the Republic, were all but accomplished facts; on his return to the Hague he would inform M. de Witt, prudently and discreetly, which, no doubt, would give him some influence in future, whilst he could rely more than ever on his Majesty's support. The day for his departure had not yet been fixed, but still it was a subject under discussion, and his Highness held himself in readiness to prepare his royal uncle, and to ask him for a solemn audience before he left.

Amidst all this warring and raging of passions,—amidst all these intrigues and cavils of politics, no one seemed to think of him who might at one time have been called the real King, the man that governed the sovereign by right divine quite as much as any of the royal mistresses.

Charles Stuart had felt the wound of his friend Buckingham as much as if it had been his own; he had repeatedly visited his beloved friend—his model in many respects, and this had caused the antechambers of Buckingham House to be constantly filled at first with a wide circle of courtiers; who, in a whisper, so as not to disturb the sufferer, had discussed all kinds of probabilities, and listened with faces of dismay to the most trivial communications of the ducal steward. Strange to say, those antechambers grew gradually emptier, until they became unfrequented altogether. Still his Grace was not dying; on the contrary, he was daily increasing in strength. He began already to take some exercise in a comfortable travelling

coach; the wound was closed, and would soon be cicatrized. But the sympathy of the courtiers always kept pace with that of the King, and when the latter cooled down the nobles could not but follow. As soon as Buckingham began to notice the coolness of his royal friend, he heard something from his henchmen as to the probable causes; but he held these to be so absurd, that he was obliged to reject them. Yet, when his Majesty ceased to inquire personally, and merely sent for a report every day, Buckingham was obliged to believe in some change or other; there were political foes in the field, who were endeavouring to supplant him during his illness. He felt, however, safe enough in his position, and found it not very difficult to obey the physician's injunction of keeping quiet at home, so as to avoid all excitement. At last he heard of the disgrace of the royal courtesans. He could have believed that the intrigues of both women were to end in the ruin of one of them; it was therefore he had been so quiet in biding his time, hoping he would be allowed to remain neutral until one should prove the conqueror, but now he began clearly to see his mistake; and when he heard of the name and fame of Mary Hollis, he understood what risk he ran of losing his Majesty's favour, and of being exposed to the attacks of an enemy, from whom even royal favour would be unable to shelter him. He would not tarry any longer: faithful to his antecedents, he would seek a refuge in the tent of the prevailing party.

The idea certainly dawned upon him that he had injured the maiden now in power, that she hated him, moreover; but then he knew the heart of woman, which was so easily to be entered as soon as it dis-

closed the slightest weakness; and that hers had done, now that she had thrown herself into the arms of the King, in order that she might have the power to rule. Well, then, he would make his peace with her; he would propose his help in cementing her influence, provided she would only tear out a few pages from the book of the past, and regard him in the light of a friend. The information he had received of the King's marvellous conversion,—of the Puritan scruples and Puritan nonsense that Whitehall had to put up with,—all that did not shake his resolution in any way, for he looked upon that outward piety as another instance of the power of the new mistress; and that power, no doubt, was only a passing one, to which Charles Stuart could not possibly submit for long, as the mistress would soon be able to perceive.

He had already ordered his coach, when he received a letter from his amiable relative, Lady Castlemaine.

The latter had not been long in discovering who was the real cause of her own exile, and that of the rival who shared her disastrous fate. It had been no mean consolation for her during the dark days of her solitude to know that Louise de Quérouaille also had been driven out of that royal mansion of which she now began to feel the loss in Oxford, and to which she was anxiously longing to return. That child whom she had raised, and by whom she had been supplanted, she would crush her if possible, and then she would rule alone, and Madame Carwell would not see Whitehall again. In this manner her temporary defeat would be her ultimate triumph. But to cause Mary's fall she wanted the assistance of somebody, and of Buckingham's she held herself assured. No doubt he was not aware of

her design upon his life, and perfectly acquainted with the interest she had shown of late in the state of his health.

What she moreover relied on was his natural dread of the influence of one whom he had so seriously injured. All these considerations combined, had induced her to write the letter which Buckingham was now reading and reading again. But however cunning my lady might deem herself in her own eyes, and however well she might know her illustrious relative, and the exact spots where he was vulnerable, yet it appeared that she overlooked a good deal in her masterly calculations. If my lady's proposal of alliance was not summarily rejected it was owing to his uncertainty whether he would succeed with Mary. He was not unwilling to see her ladyship, but he did not intend to work for her. In order to insure for himself the greatest possible advantage, he thought it best to pursue his habitual see-saw policy: he would pretend to support both the courtesans, and abide his time for taking side with the one who would make the most strenuous efforts to regain her lost influence. And so it was, that the Duchess of Portsmouth was one fine day surprised in her pleasant and elegant Hatfield Manor—which retreat, by the bye, she did not like at all—by the mysterious invitation of a messenger to appear at a given time and in the strictest incognito at the gate of Buckingham House. Her Grace accepted the invitation with assumed indifference, and not without objecting to the mysterious way in which it was conveyed, as well as to the condition of coming incognito. To all appearance she was by no means anxious to see her order of exile repealed, and not in any way afraid of the future.

In reality, her easiness and indifference were more than ever a pretext, since the last letter which she had received from the French ambassador.

We have seen her leave the Palace bantering and mocking the rival mistress, to whom she ascribed her disgrace; for she felt confident that Charles Stuart would soon fall into financial difficulties again, and that these would melt his cooling heart. Of late, however, she had been informed that the King was endeavouring to be reconciled to his Parliament; Charles had been asking for new subsidies, and if these were granted, her exile might be prolonged, nay, commuted into an entire removal from England. Was it to be wondered at, then, that she received Buckingham's invitation with more of inward satisfaction than she found it necessary to betray?

At the same time Lady Castlemaine had been rather more expeditious. After the necessary precautions not to be discovered and arrested, she had at once left Oxford, and safely arrived at Buckingham House. She welcomed the familiar vestibule and hall with evident satisfaction. How humbled was that woman, at one time aspiring to the throne, and now happy to spend even a few hours in the metropolis! She was received by the steward, who conducted her through several corridors until they reached the conservatory, near the fatal gold-leather closet, where the Duke of Buckingham awaited her in one of his most elegant costumes, stiff with gold lace and weighty with glittering diamonds.

The labour of dressing had fatigued him a little, and this would have brought his sickly features into still stronger relief but for the rouge that remedied

the evil; he stepped forward however to receive her ladyship, quite as if he were himself again. It entered into his design to make both her and her rival believe in his final recovery, and consequently in his intention shortly to reappear at Court, where he would be able to dispel all current rumours about his prolonged indisposition. With my lady at least his success was certainly complete; she congratulated him heartily on his recovery, and pressed both his hands with an unmistakable grasp of friendship.

"That'll do, Sarah! that'll do!" said he with a smile, as he offered her a seat, and then hastened to sit down himself.

"These are ominous days for the Villiers, George; but with perseverance and co-operation we may yet change the state of affairs."

"A solemn exordium, indeed, Sarah. I suppose that's about the way in which you would have spoken over my grave; that is to say, the first hour following my funeral, because after that you would be too much engaged in your grand, gigantic plans. How well they all succeed!"

"I deserve your reproach, George," said she in a submissive tone, which was little in harmony with her inward resentment. "I was aiming at the elevation of the Villiers, and should have succeeded if all the Villiers had been persevering." She retorted but mildly and gently this time, for she knew that she was in that man's power.

"I am not sure that the combined perseverance of all the Villiers would have been of any avail. What good is the fisherman's bait if the fish will not bite? My good Sarah, do you know this closet?" asked he with a smile.

She set her teeth. Did he intend to make her feel that she was in his power? Did he mean first to humble her, in order to raise her afterwards? Well, if he did she would allow herself to be humbled, but once being raised she would make him pay dearly.

"Madame Carwell was a sly Frenchwoman," said she; "she was, perhaps, a fish that liked the bait well enough, but did not care for the hook; however, let us leave that alone, and discuss our own affairs."

"It is very kind of you indeed even to think of me when nobody is connected with the matter except yourself. I have no reason yet to believe in my own disgrace, but I am perfectly sure of yours; however, let us hear your plan, whether it is contrived with your ordinary skill."

"My plan is a very simple one. It is still possible for you to approach Charles, and to scatter the fanatic gang that surrounds him. A few magic words from your lips, and old Rowley will be cured; the strings are so tightly stretched that they must break."

"We shall see."

"Not so much levity, George!" said my lady, with sudden emphasis; "your own influence is at stake."

"Of that you have endeavoured to convince me so very often. Do you remember the last occasion, when you thought of bringing that Yorkshire puppy into contact with Louise de Quérouaille?"

"That was when you wished to have your revenge on the woman who had crushed you under her feet; but you were afterwards generous enough to forget that, and she was gentle enough to receive you at her knees. And you bowed there no longer as her lover, but

as her subject, or rather as her servant; is it not true, George?"

"Oh dear no, my good Sarah! Wherever I hold out my hand it is grasped readily enough by every one—by Louise, as well as by you; only in this case I am not in a hurry to take the initiative."

"Not in a hurry? Reckless man, you are sleeping at the edge of a precipice. She who is in power now is the one whom you persecuted."

"I know that."

"She will have her revenge."

"She will forgive a repentant sinner, Sarah. Is she not a woman like yourself, and how many sinners have not you forgiven, even impenitent ones?"

"You have violated the Habeas Corpus Act; Parliament has met, and Shaftesbury is in the zenith of his power."

"I have foreseen all that, my kind and thoughtful Sarah. I am not guilty of anything of the kind; it is all the work of a certain Wharton, whom I will myself deliver into the hands of justice. You see that I am very frank."

"You are mistaken; the raving fanatic will not forgive you; I know her too well for that. You may justify yourself before Parliament, but you cannot exculpate yourself before her; she seems a shrub, but in her is the germ of the oak. Be warned!"

"We shall see."

"But whence your coolness? it is assumed. And why is it? Do you believe that I ever was or could be hostile to you? Did I not cause the young boor to be imprisoned?"

"And to be forgiven afterwards."

"No, that was her doing, and that shows exactly the extent of her power. It was true that I went myself to announce his discharge, but that was in order to conceal the defeat which I had really sustained. However, why should I defend myself before the man who enticed me hither, as it were in ambuscade, in order to insult and to provoke me?"

She rose, as if she deemed any further talk superfluous; still she did not move towards the door, fearing that he might actually let her go. Was he so sure, then, of his own position, that he dared crush her out of revenge?

"Pray, do not go, Barbara," replied Buckingham. "You must be indeed convinced of your defeat to remain so comparatively calm. You see, Sarah, that's all I desired to try. If you are helped you will be all the more grateful for it, whilst the consciousness of your present weakness will render you all the more subdued in future. That you will be so hereafter, is exactly what I want to make sure of. What can you give me in exchange for what I offer you? Too liberal Sarah! you have given away so much that you have hardly anything left."

That she should have to listen to all that, and be compelled to keep silent—not to betray in her features that which was raging and waging war within. If she ever regained her power, regained it for one day only, how would she make him pay! Oh, it was madness for the present to think of the throne of England; but she was longing to occupy it for one hour only, that she might see George Villiers down at her feet. That satisfaction she would have been willing to repay with ten years of her earthly existence.

"You have made a compact with Madame Carwell," exclaimed she, suddenly, "and you have called me hither to be a witness of your tender relation towards each other. Only beware of that woman; she is as cunning as the serpent."

"You may tell her so, Sarah; you will see her here in a moment."

"Here? You would make me meet her here?"

"Why not? Do not forget that I have been confined to my bed for weeks, and that you should not grudge me the one moment of enjoyment which your meeting here together cannot fail to produce."

"George, you must keep that woman at a distance. In the interest of our family her exile must not be commuted."

"But in my own interest, perhaps, it must. Adorable Sarah! I prefer making two grateful souls to one ungrateful one."

"You must scarcely be a man to be able to forget the insult you have received at her hands. She will not rest until she has me expelled, and then your days are numbered as well. Who was it that aimed at your life? And she boasted of it in your own palace, when she walked by my side at the fancy ball."

"Did you hear that?" asked he, with a strange glance of the eye and an ominous expression of the face. She inferred from this, and rightly too, that he had not forgotten those words, and that the punishment, although for a while postponed, had not been entirely given up.

How suddenly, however, did the whole of that appearance change, when the steward uttered in a whisper

the name of the Duchess of Portsmouth, and her Grace entered almost immediately after.

"Hail! *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche,*" exclaimed she, holding out her little hand to Buckingham, and then—without in any way showing her inward surprise and vexation—she made a low curtsey before her ladyship, adding, "Fortune favours me indeed; to meet so much eminence on such a little spot of ground."

"It appears," remarked my lady, sarcastically, "that your Grace has lost nothing of your amiable disposition at Hatfield Manor."

"Well, how could that be? Is not the seat full of reminiscences of the Duke? I hope my lady will not deny me the pleasure of her company in the course of next summer?"

"If I had confidence that you would be able to receive me then; but, your Grace, judging the future by the present I have but little hopes."

"How gloomy you are! Is that the effect of your Oxford reminiscences?" asked she, in a jocose manner, although perfectly aware how painful these words must be to my lady. It was at Oxford that she had first made Charles Stuart's acquaintance; it was there that he had sworn his first vows of eternal love.

She addressed Buckingham without awaiting my lady's reply. "But I should have almost forgotten you and your interests as well. Now, then, my Lord Duke, what is it that you propose?"

"In the first place, I must compliment you. Your imperturbable cheerfulness commands my admiration. Do you know what is going on at Whitehall?"

"No! anything particular? Jack is not dead, is he?"

My lady perceived at once the great advantages which her rival had over herself. Louise had been invited by Buckingham because he wished for her alliance, whilst she had come as a supplicant soliciting his assistance. Buckingham did not betray that he thought the same as Mrs. Palmer. His position towards these two women, equally feeble and helpless, was too favourable not to bend their pride. The one had been humbled already, the other, however cheerful and hopeful now, he would likewise teach to sing in a different key.

"If Jack is the only creature in which your Grace takes an interest, our interview need not be a long one, for your monkey is all right."

"And so are the others with whom I sympathize, for here they are before me.

"Surely it is very cruel of your Grace to make me leave my delightful Hatfield in order to receive a communication which could have easily reached me by post. Or I may be wrong, perhaps it was your intention to make me meet her ladyship? To whom is my gratitude due? to Lady Castlemaine or to his Grace of Buckingham?"

"Not to me," said my lady, hastily. "Honour to whom honour is due. The happy thought is entirely his Grace's. Still you have the privilege of being remembered if you are not seen."

"Which means, amiable friend, that you did not exactly want to see me. What a difference between you and me! No doubt you will call my ejaculation a very flattering one, but what a contrast! I was so longing to see you that I often had to restrain myself from going to Oxford to pay you the tribute of my

homage. With that country wench you have wrought miracles! Pity only that your pretty little dear does not show more gratitude towards the obliging fairy."

Here my lady could no longer govern herself. She raised her head proudly, and looked with piercing, flashing eyes at the irreconcilable foe who even in the greatest danger persecuted her with her venomous taunts. "I have carried out my design better than you think, for the girl is English who supplanted you; she knows that your place is across the Channel, and thither she will be happy to have you conveyed."

"Shall I have the pleasure of your ladyship's company on my voyage?" asked the Duchess. "Do you know at all whether the date is fixed yet? I promise you that you will find me very merry."

"So you are now, very much to my annoyance," retorted my lady.

"I was not aware that anything could possibly annoy you. But I see my mirth has at all events more effect upon you than all the tortures of your recent tender love-affair, with that country figure by whom I properly ought to have been captivated. My dear friend, how happy you are in choosing your instruments!"

At this juncture Buckingham thought proper to interfere. He had been unwilling to prevent a conflict which he had been perfectly able to foresee, but my lady was by far the weaker, and therefore she ought to be assisted. "I imagine Jupiter entering just now. I am sure he would depart at once, for he would not know to whom to assign the palm of victory. Be serious now, Louise, just for a moment, and think of the danger that threatens us."

"Then it was for my sake that you asked me to come hither? How very kind! But I am no more uneasy than I am impatient. I am delighted with Hatfield Manor."

Buckingham bit his lips. Instead of acting the protector he was put down by that woman as her *protégé*, by that woman who, in his opinion, was in the same danger as the other, although her indifference gave him the idea that she had chances which he did not know of. In order that he might ascertain what she concealed from him he changed his tactics entirely. He did not say another word about an alliance of any kind, but merely made a sign to his steward, who returned a moment afterwards merely nodding to his master, whereupon the latter rose as actively as possible, offered an arm to each lady, and conducted them to the conservatory, where a cold collation had been prepared amid the most exquisite productions of exotic vegetation. An abundance of the choicest fruits and wines, served on the most elegant salvers, and sparkling in the finest crystal decanters, adorned the table at which the trio sat down. My lady looked gloomily before her and spoke but very little; she knew that this would increase Madame Carwell's wit and mirth, but she could not help herself. She did not touch any of the fruits or wines until her beloved relative and his companion had tasted of the same, a caution which she deemed necessary under existing circumstances. Buckingham became merrier every moment, and thought the time had come to speak seriously with his guests, when the steward entered with a gentle step and handed his Grace a small three-cornered note.

The Duke grew visibly pale as he read the con-

tents. It was a message from his illustrious factotum, Dick Wharton, that he was in the hands of justice, and begged his Grace's interference to serve him. Dick in prison, Dick whom he was just about to send to the Continent if my lady had spoken the truth that the abduction of Mary Hollis was really being investigated. He too was in danger! He did not give himself any more trouble to convince the Duchess of Portsmouth of the reasonableness of his protection, but went straight to his aim; he confessed their position to be more dangerous than he had himself imagined, and acknowledged that Lady Castlemaine had perfectly surveyed the field.

Her ladyship looked up in surprise. Was that compliment a sign of advance on his part, and, if so, what was the cause of so sudden a change? Could it be that note? And what was it about? Her supposition, well-founded as it was, could not be confirmed, as she was unable to ask the question.

We shall soon have occasion to see what it was that induced the Duke to prize my lady's assistance a little higher now that Dick Wharton had been apprehended. For the present it may suffice to know that he constantly kept his eye fixed on her during the consultation which he now entered upon. This may have been partly owing to the silence of Louise de Quérouaille, who did not pretend any longer that she could well afford to wait, but who, on the other hand, made no sign whatsoever of taking any active part in the ensuing transactions.

"You must go and see old Rowley immediately," said my lady.

"You are right, Barbara; and if matters stand as I

imagine, I have got a plan that must succeed. Only both of you, ladies, must act a part in my domestic drama—you too, Louise!"

"Perhaps; if I like the cast."

"The two parts can only be taken by you two. What are your terms, Louise?"

Her ladyship frowned.

"None whatever," answered the Duchess. "Let us hear about my part."

"Pardon me, my pretty friend, but on this occasion I shall not lay down the plan of the campaign until the eve of the battle."

Buckingham took an affectionate leave of both; the sky had cleared up after the thick thunderclouds; the ladies shook hands, and vowed each other mutual support. At the same time that the lips of the two women uttered the word of fidelity, they had already made up their minds to take as much advantage as possible, even at the expense of each other, of the victory that was in view. Still, if we could look into the two hearts carefully, we should find the greater firmness of purpose in the seemingly careless and whimsical Duchess of Portsmouth.

With a beating heart Buckingham alighted from his coach at the large gate of Whitehall. No one had been informed of the purport of his visit, nor indeed of the visit itself, and yet he feared for a moment that the officer on duty at the gate would step forward to tell him that his Majesty would not receive him.

Fortunately he was not confirmed in his fear, for he was allowed to proceed as usual by the familiar entrance and galleries. The few nobles whom he met

on his way were not a little embarrassed how to act; they did not know, now that so much was changed, whether the favourite of former days had not forfeited his enviable position, and still they would not seem to be wanting in respect for his Grace, who might exceptionally have remained what he was before. Buckingham may have noticed this, but he certainly did not betray it; he went through the well-known antechambers, and found himself on the threshold of the royal apartments, which he entered in the usual manner, without being previously announced. His Majesty was in conversation with several gentlemen, or rather was listening to one who seemed to speak in the name of the others. Charles hastily beckoned him to go, and Buckingham obeyed with fear in his heart. Had it really come to this, that he, his best friend, could no longer get near him? What was he to do? Should he remain, to be denied the palace by and by, or should he obey, and thus lose every opportunity of engaging in the struggle?

Luckily his doubts were cleared up by the arrival of a page, who requested his Grace, in his Majesty's name, to wait until the deputation from the House of Commons had withdrawn. Those individuals he had seen were members of the House, and his Majesty stood before them, if not like a repentant sinner, yet by no means as the King by right divine. And how much had he, Buckingham, to fear from that Parliament, especially since the apprehension of Dick Wharton, who, there was no doubt about it, would turn King's evidence.

The entrance of the King put a stop to his anything but pleasant meditations. His Majesty approached,

holding out both arms, and crying, "You here, George! Welcome, man, welcome!"

So cordial a reception seemed a good omen to Buckingham. Charles Stuart had not forgotten all his old friends. But his Grace's satisfaction was tempered a little as soon as he looked a little closer at that serious and sombre countenance of his Majesty, which almost reminded one of the blessed martyr his father. Still Buckingham returned the hearty welcome by pressing the hand of his royal friend.

"Although I am by no means quite recovered, yet I could no longer resist the temptation to see you. It is so very long since I heard anything from you. How changed you are, Charles! It is as if you are suffering from a serious wound, and, judging by your appearance, you have not entered even upon the first stage of recovery."

"Never mind," replied Charles, somewhat hastily. "Now that you are back I am no longer alone. Only you too must change, Will."

"And become as I find you? No, thank you, sire. By Jove, Charles, what has been going on? I am told that you have sent away the angels that sweetened your existence, and I find you here amidst a mob of parliamentary undertakers. My poor friend, who is it that has brought you as far as that?"

"Who is it? Oh, it is an angel in the shape of a lovely woman, a Madonna, as gentle as a lamb, as sensible as a bishop—it is . . . ."

"I understand, a novelty. Yet it was unwise to cast off the old ties so suddenly, unless you did it in order that they should the sooner be renewed. Charles, who knew better how to make a paradise of

this earthly vale of tears than old Sarah, and who knew better how to conjure the golden raindrops than your charming Louise?"

Charles did not answer, but turned aside. "My good people are elated with joy," said he after a while; "they shout and cheer as soon as they see only the tip of the feather in my hat. Oh, it is sweet to be loved."

"Oh yes, it is sweet to be applauded outside, if one dies with *ennui* indoors."

"Who tells you that such is my case?" asked Charles, hastily.

"Yourself: your face denotes the same pleasure as when you were treated some time ago to an hour's sermon at Westminster. Oh, my good friend, it is sweet to be loved, and so easy at the same time. All you have to do is constantly to put up with the whims of the people."

"No, Will, no. I have never been so much of a King as I am now. I am the ruler, and nobody else; I see now what is going on."

"I believe you: you *see* what is going on, only you might have done so at less expense. You rule? But surely, my worthy friend, so does your Madonna. She is as sensible as a bishop, but those prelates are very tedious as a rule, especially when they have got sense, and is not that the case with your Madonna?"

"Do not speak of her, Will. She is worth more than we two together: she is the noblest creature I have seen in all my life."

"Or the sliest, perhaps; I know her, Rowley," said he, in a whisper, as he drew nearer to the King.

"Wherever did you make her acquaintance?" asked the King, abruptly.

"At Hallam. At that time she was by no means inexorable."

"You lie, George Villiers; I do not tolerate any banter on that point. She is the only one in whom there is no guile, the only one, do you hear?"

Buckingham was silent for a moment; he saw that he was on the wrong track. The carrying out of his design was more difficult than he had imagined; for Charles Stuart had found a woman whom he respected. On this side, therefore, the fortress was not to be taken, he had even to be cautious in his retreat.

"You have known her at Hallam? Do you know who brought her here?" asked Charles.

Was that question one of policy? Could the girl have accused him? He was afraid she had, and with her present relation towards his Majesty that might become dangerous for him. He had to save himself by boldness, and remembered that his cordial reception was at all events a favourable omen.

"Did she never tell you? Did she never speak to you of the friend of her youth, of her dear playmate, who had almost sent me to an uncomfortable place? At all events she has not forgotten him; at least, if I am rightly informed that that young gentleman has recovered his liberty and his commission through her interference. Charles, I am rather doubtful of your Madonna!"

His Majesty changed colour. "I readily believe that you are doubtful of any woman," said the King, abruptly. "I will investigate the matter, George, in order to

convince you of your error; and if my investigation proves against you, you need not think of being received again in the house where she is dwelling."

"Which means when translated into plain language, sire, that I must take leave or be shown the door. And then after I am gone, Rowley, my place will be taken by some Roundhead or other whom you may cause to rise from the tomb. What a glorious company! A Madonna who is prettiest when she weeps, a Roundhead who never ceases with his texts until he has brawled the last sentence of the last of the prophets, and then in the background Shaftesbury holding a fool's cap in one hand and setting his parliamentary dogs at you with the other. If at least their barking did not prevent you from sleeping."

He had expected a storm after these taunting words, which the King might have thought unbecoming, but to his great surprise and satisfaction no answer followed. Charles was in a gloomy mood, and turned his head aside; he threw himself upon a couch, and asked after a few minutes' silence, in a tone almost as that of old, "How did you think Whitehall looked when you came in?"

"To my taste Westminster Abbey is much finer."

"What a strange answer."

"Did we not speak of magnificent tombs, sire?"

Charles fell again into his meditations.

"Pity that nobody has even thought of an epitaph for the tombs of Barbara and Louise."

"Do you think that would be necessary to snatch their names from oblivion?"

"Yes, and yet no. Rowley, how you torture yourself to appear different from what you are. You

have not forgotten the two goddesses that graced Olympus, that smoothed with their satin hands the furrows from the careworn brow, and kissed every ill-humour away with their rosy lips of down. Rowley, upon my soul, your Madonna is glorious in marble, but I prefer the others by my side in the ordinary flesh and blood."

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, Will! I never heard you speak of either with so much Christian admiration. Have you seen them lately?"

"There are your old suspicions again. Suppose I had seen them, and had moaned and wailed with the poor victims of Court intrigue, and met the charming Magdalenes in garments of repentance! They were looking lovely, Rowley."

"Were they, Will? and did they seem enraged with the old lover? What did Sarah think or say? But no, I will not hear anything about them. They have played with me as if with a buffoon, they have made a tool of me, of me, the King! Has not that spy of Louis XIV. betrayed my secrets? Has she not let out everything to my nephew Orange? Will, that concerns you too. Orange knows everything—everything, and then the other——"

"We shall get over all that, Rowley; it is not so bad perhaps that she has been talking: so much the sooner the mine will have to spring, and then—don't forget that—the bills will be accepted."

"But that would make me dependent, and that is just what I do not wish to be."

"As if you will not be dependent upon Parliament when you look for its support. I have heard of that silly step, Rowley. Parliament has met again. Sup-

plies have been asked for; for every penny you get a lecture, and for every pound they demand a jewel from your crown. I should rather be the ally of Louis XIV. than the *protégé* of my own subjects. I vow that you were just now listening to a sermon from those country cousins, of course *in optima forma*, very submissive, but full of venom."

He had touched the spot where Charles Stuart was vulnerable. The King rose and paced the room in great excitement, muttering some inaudible and incoherent words. Buckingham followed him with his eyes, and endeavoured to guess his thoughts. However difficult that might be to him, yet he was sure of having gained ground and desirous of moving forward with firm steps.

"Do you know what day it is to-day, old friend?"

"Will, are you really mad?" cried the King, with a frown, no doubt because he was disturbed in his serious meditations.

"To-day is Thursday, to-morrow will be Friday, and Friday used to be our Club night. Our Club night! Are you still allowed to think of such a thing? I lay a wager, Rowley, that you have never ventured to speak with your Madonna about it. There was never any moaning and wailing; no, merely banter and wit. There you never sat down with the fear of not looking serious and righteous enough, or of being rebuked for your extravagance by a subject whom you had asked for money. We have so often met there as merry brethren, and Charles Stuart was never wittier than there. Now he is practising psalm-singing. Upon my soul, Charles, the whim has lasted too long."

"It is no whim, Buckingham."

"Let us meet to-morrow."

"No, no, I do not wish for any such meetings. I have had quite enough of them."

"You do not wish for them? King of Great Britain and Ireland, you are not permitted to attend them. You imagine that you are more of a King than you were before. Formerly you could be King at least at the Club, now you dare not even enjoy your life."

"If it were my wish, Buckingham, then——"

"Even then it would not be Madonna's desire. And you imagine that you are the ruler? Does your Majesty know that my servant has been apprehended this very morning in order that he may be brought up as a witness against me?" asked Buckingham, not entirely able to conceal his intense anxiety.

"Nonsense! they won't touch you."

"Does your Majesty think so? I hope your Majesty will pardon me, but your Majesty's opinion does not satisfy me in this respect. Parliament is very strong."

"My parliament shall never touch a hair of your head. I will have the matter investigated. You doubt my power? Well then, Will, whatever the fellow's outrage may be, I pardon him because he has served you."

"And because Rowley does not wish to lose his friend, his only friend. Such a proof of your power is not yet quite sufficient. Let us meet together with the old brethren. Let us once more remember the past; it is worth thinking of, Rowley. I promise you a quatrain, or something of that sort, such as I have not made for the last two years."

A page here opened the door, and brought his

Majesty a message from Earl Shaftesbury that his lordship dared not open the proceedings of the Privy Council before his Majesty was present, so that he respectfully proposed for his Majesty's consideration whether it would not be better to appear. Charles Stuart heaved a deep sigh, and said as he took Buckingham's arm—

"Will, come along with me to the Council."

"Much obliged, sire; by not going I can at least show that I am a free man. I hope your Majesty will enjoy yourself."

"When shall I see you again, Will?"

"To-morrow night at the Club."

"Come to-night, and I will let you know my resolution. *A tantôt?*"

"Your Majesty's wish is a law to me," said Buckingham, with a low bow, after which he left his royal friend —the King, who was going to the Privy Council as the lamb that is led to the slaughter. Buckingham was satisfied with his incipient triumph, but still he saw that it was well, first, that his illness had not lasted much longer, and second, that Rowley's wonderful conversion was not too deeply rooted yet.

CHAPTER VIII.

ILLUSION!

THE room which had been so often arranged in Whitehall for masques or ballets, occasionally even for the representation of Shakspeare's plays, had not been used for some time, and was generally looked upon by the Court as condemned to be soon turned into a dissenting chapel. In more than one respect such a change would have been a sin against all propriety. True, a highly cultivated taste would have called the apartment rather overdone, but still the *ensemble* was not of an unpleasing effect. The floor, although inlaid, was altogether covered with a Smyrna carpet. The walls were divided into oblong squares by gold-grained pillars, and adorned with the most costly Gobelin tapestry, a present from Versailles. There were the softest couches all round, and most beautifully carved oak chairs round the table of mahogany which occupied the centre of the room, whilst the highly coloured pictures on the ceiling represented the *dénoûment* of the idyll exhibited along the walls. On our entering it would be impossible to survey the whole, for in the background was a kind of amphitheatre for the plays or ballets which was now hidden by two heavy curtains of blue damask

silk interwoven with silver thread. The room could never be used by daylight, inasmuch as the windows had been sacrificed to the costly tapestry of the walls, and this was to the great advantage of the magnificent saloon, for had it been otherwise the walls might have betrayed spots and stains of which the Court would not have liked to give an explanation. Those intimate meetings might partly have caused those stains and spots, but as they had been brought on by candlelight it was better that the light of day should not meddle with it.

The fear which the Court party had for a moment entertained did not seem to be confirmed, for suddenly, but stealthily and mysteriously, a chamberlain was seen to enter this apartment—a chamberlain with a few lackeys; and when the door was shut behind them there was a moving and arranging of furniture that could be heard in the corridor. He that might have been fortunate enough to obtain a peep inside would have seen how all the chandeliers were being supplied with candles, and how the hall was reassuming its wonted appearance. The mysterious way in which everything was being prepared was exactly what would have excited curiosity. Could it be that the new favourite desired at last to enjoy her glorious position, and to receive the homage of the Court? But then the great reception-hall would have been prepared. Could it be that the saint was descending from her pedestal to wander on earth with ordinary mortals, and that she too wished to enjoy a ballet or a masque? But that very morning the saint had read to his Majesty from the Bible; that very day she had induced him to sign a decree against the desecration of the

Sabbath. Everybody was asking, sighing, longing for a favourable change in the oppressive atmosphere of Court life; one hoped for a thunderstorm, but nothing more was seen than a gathering of the clouds. Still that was something; the thunderstorm was approaching, and many a one's supposition was better founded than he imagined.

Mad Will had been with Rowley the night before, and the hours had dwindled down into minutes. Rowley's old laugh had been heard, his brow had unbent again; he had not had to listen to lectures of wisdom, so painful because of the truth which they conveyed; not any mention was made of Parliament, not any doubt entertained as to the subsidies. Mad Will was merry, full of wit and humour, although his breast-wound did not allow him yet to be quite himself again. Still he had wrought marvels; he had changed the present Charles Stuart for a whole evening into old Rowley, and Charles Stuart liked that well enough for one evening. He had granted Will his request to commemorate once more the old familiar Club, only the meeting was to be strictly private; he thought that this being the very last time, it need not reach the ears of Mary and scandalize her; he had allowed her that morning to read for longer than usual from her favourite book; he had listened to Shaftesbury without growing impatient, and above all, for the sake of security, he would not let anybody know.

So it was that all necessary preparations were being secretly made under the superintendence of Buckingham; nay, could the King have watched his Grace's arrangements, he too would have been unable to conceal his surprise.

After dinner every one had been sent away with the exception of the most confidential chamberlain, who had been ordered to wait for his Majesty. Charles had gone by the same old galleries, which he had not frequented for some time, until he came through a long suite of rooms to a door of which he alone possessed the key. That door was a secret entrance to the room now lighted up by the gently glimmering light of innumerable candles. He was greeted by a pleasant warm atmosphere and by the well-known sound of merry voices. Here he found Buckingham, Milford, Arundel, and a few other nobles, all of whom Charles had missed for a very long time, or whom he had so coolly received of late at his receptions that they reckoned themselves to be in disgrace.

"Everything has been done quietly, Will? Nobody has noticed anything?"

"No, high and mighty lord and King!" was the sarcastic answer. "I have dressed up your Majesty's lackeys in black dominoes, and ordered them to go in and out by the side door. I have told them to walk in woollen stockings, and I have put a screw upon their lips, so that your Majesty may rest assured that none of your subjects suspect anything, and that no member of Parliament shall hint at it to-morrow, even in the most respectful manner. I hope your Majesty has been made easy by the precautions of your most humble and obedient subject?"

"More than sufficiently, Will," cried Charles, in the best of humours. "Tom and Bob," continued he, addressing Milford and Arundel, "go and sit down, boys, each in his old place. How strangely you look at me! You must not think of what happened the

other day. I was obliged to be serious at the reception, but now I am Rowley again."

"That is to say for the last time," interrupted Will. "Had you not better tell them at once? That will induce them to make tenfold efforts to enjoy themselves. Yes, brethren, this is a farewell to sin. To-morrow, all of us, in brand-new linen, march into the new Jerusalem!"

"We had better just stick a little longer to the old one," said Arundel, a young man whose very appearance betrayed that he was living on intimate terms with the sinful earth.

The conversation was continued, but not without slackening occasionally. Buckingham almost tried the impossible, but he was scarcely supported by the other brethren. Milford, Arundel, and the others kept themselves in the background, as if they were afraid that Rowley should turn King again before the break of day. Rowley, however, only showed this time that he wished to be the oldest brother and nothing more. He went to the sideboard, whence he fetched the old pipes and tobacco, whilst Will set some French wines upon the table, and very soon the bluish vapour was circling over their heads, an offering to the temple of the goddess whom they worshipped.

"You have catered well, George! you have indeed. Where do you get that tobacco from?"

"It is the same sort we always had; only privation, you see, enhances the enjoyment."

"A very sensible remark; but under present circumstances more striking than true," remarked Milford.

"Fill your glasses. I have an idea," cried Buck-

ingham. "I drink to our more intimate acquaintance. We have lost sight of each other for weeks, and during that time a good deal may have happened to all of us. Suppose we read to each other the last pages of our autobiography."

"Not I," said Rowley.

"Well, you may be excepted, for we all know what has happened to you," interrupted Buckingham. "You get up, Milford."

"I have been of late besieged in my apartments by a host of creditors; for a long time I kept them at arm's length by paying the one with what I borrowed from the other, and *probatum est*, Rowley. Only there was one fellow, as poor as a church mouse, as hungry as my youngest spaniel, as sharp as a needle, and as impudent as an M.P.; he was too bad. I had no other prospect but a visit from the sheriff's officer; for Rowley was not at home. I wrote to the governor, in Kent, to send me a few bank-notes for my funeral, as I was dying, begging him at the same time not to start on his journey until the day of my interment, so as to avoid all needless emotion. He complied with the latter part of my request, but not with the former, so that I am still a-dying. Then I got another idea. I sent for my greatest dun; and he informed me that all my creditors were firmly leagued together to share the expenses of my imprisonment. I told him in strict confidence that I had just received five-hundred pounds from Kent, that I ought properly to divide them among all my creditors; yet as I would rather give them to him who was the most troublesome of the lot, I had made up my mind to bury them if they let it come so far as imprisonment. All this the fellow took in; he

got up a quarrel among the vagabonds, and called on me this morning to receive his reward."

"And how did he look," asked Rowley, "when he was sent away with empty hands?"

"The blackguard! he now made it as clear as daylight to me that one creditor with a firm will was more dangerous than two or three that could not agree, and that he would send me this time to a respectable gaol. I intend to bear my fate manfully, and to say with our Will, that privation enhances the enjoyment. And so it is that I too am at our Club for the last time, for my vulture has got a heart of stone. Rowley, I am sure you feel for me."

Charles Stuart just laughed by way of assent, they touched glasses together, although he looked upon the whole tale as a hint to himself, more especially the conclusion, "It was better to have many creditors than one."

"Yes, by all the saints of heaven, that is true," cried Rowley, more confidentially than prudently. "Privation enhances the enjoyment, you say? Yes, when privation is followed by enjoyment, but not when you stop at privation. Bob, I'm sure you were not born for a gaol."

"Nor you either?" asked Bob.

"Now it is your turn, Tom," cried all together. Tom, *alias* Arundel, emptied his brimming tumbler at a draught, and then assumed a most pitiful appearance.

"I am more wretched and worse off than Bob," began he. "He is provoked by his creditors, and I by those who are so much in my debt. Annie and Caroline, adorable nymphs, you are vanished through my own fault! Amiable fairies, who turned my gold

into copper, ye that received the homage of the Languedoc vine-proprietors and the milliners of Versailles, oh, ye have cruelly forsaken me! Who is there now to shake me and stir me up whenever I am about to fall asleep? Who is there now to advise me about the taste and the bouquet of my wines? Who is to prepare the sauces for my table? Everything is gone, everything is lost, because—would you believe it?—because once, in a moment of despair, I spoke of turning hermit; they took to their heels immediately, and I have not heard from them since. Oh, dear Rowley, that it were true, that here too privation might prove to enhance the enjoyment!"

"Poor Tom! but your misfortune is only imaginary, man. You have not turned hermit yet, that I could swear."

"Rowley is right, and who is a better judge of hermits than he is?" cried Will. His words were greeted with general applause, even from the King, who intimated to him that it was his turn now. "My story of the last few weeks," said Buckingham, "is short, well known, and the saddest of all. I have been confined to my bedroom, whereas all of you, Rowley excepted, have at least been able to make debtors or creditors. But do you, fellows, know why I have been tied to my couch?"

"Because you got such a pleasant cut from that youngster."

"Very nice indeed, Bob. But why did I get that pleasant or stupid cut, as I should rather call it? Because I was the cause of his being disturbed in that delightful *tête-à-tête* with his sweetheart."

"Who was his sweetheart?"

"Why, the chaste Diana, or, in Christian phraseology, Madonna Mary Hollis."

"Will, you are in error," exclaimed Rowley. "No, that cannot be. What if she deceived me after all?" murmured he. And he was thinking how in that case he would be free again, which he certainly was not now, however he tried to convince his friends of the contrary.

"What would Rowley say if now, for the last time, we took to the cards again?"

"For the last time? You speak like an undertaker, Will. Where are our friends? Here are my guineas. Bob, have you managed to keep one at the bottom of your purse? If not we'll go halves."

"Surely, Rowley: I have still got my five hundred."

"That is true. Well then, boys, let us lose no time!"

One bottle was emptied after another, and the effect of the ruddy nectar showed itself in Rowley's sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks.

"Have you thought of my poor Dick?" asked Buckingham, in a whisper.

"The matter is being investigated, so Shaftesbury told me. Don't speak about that now."

"Or never, you mean. Poor Rowley, have you not evidence enough to see that they trifle with you? However, I have your word that not a hair of his head shall be touched."

"All right! all right! Confound anything like politics!" cried Rowley, who was just fingering a pile of guineas. He was unusually fortunate, and had a mass of gold before him. "Bob, you must tell me to-morrow what your debts amount to. I will pay them, that is to say if they are at all payable. Tom, you had better not turn hermit, and call your fair debtors

back. Goodness! what would Heaven itself be without women in it?"

"That we may judge of by Whitehall," was the answer.

"Only Whitehall is under the protection of a beneficent fairy, who is very liberally disposed towards Rowley. At a moment's notice Whitehall may shake off its mournful appearance, and don the wedding garment of old. One stroke of Rowley's wand and everything is changed."

"Yes, Rowley is a great man," said Charles, laughing. "Here, boys, is to the goddesses, the lovely priestesses of thundering Jove, who, as we all know, was a connoisseur." With these words he raised his tumbler.

"Isn't it," said Buckingham, in a declamatory tone, "as if the fairy were beginning to believe in Rowley's mighty will? Listen!" cried he, more loudly.

In the background sounded indeed the melodious tones of a mandoline and the silvery notes of two gentle harmonizing female voices. Charles Stuart started to his feet; these sounds were surely familiar to him? He moved a step forward, almost undecided what to do, hardly knowing what to think or say, until a magic power prompted him to move the curtains of the amphitheatre, and his eyes beheld the most fantastic scene. A garden of flowers, a wood of leaves, magically lighted up by invisible candles, and in the midst of the garden, on a bench strewn with moss and roses, two "goddesses" dressed like the Arcadian shepherdesses on the tapestry of the room.

"Bids our bleeding heart farewell,"

was the last line that struck his Majesty's ear, and

which was repeated in unison by the two enchanting voices.

"No, no! no farewell," cried Charles, "Sarah! Louise!" cried he, as if he had quite realized his position again, "welcome! welcome!" He embraced the two "goddesses," and amidst the cheers of the others, who watched the touching scene from a respectful distance, he invited Sarah and Louise to descend from their artificial Eden, upon the reality of this earth, where they were sure to meet homage and worship instead of cruel words of farewell.

"How pale you are, Rowley! Just look here, Louise," said Lady Castlemaine, as she gave her dearly beloved friend a gentle tap on the cheek, "see how he has been repining, almost as much as we, dear."

"We could not part without bidding you farewell," said Louise.

"And the way in which you did it is highly creditable to your taste. Well, my pretty dears, I do not mean to be ungrateful. I am sure, Will, that is all your invention."

"I will not deny that I have been let into the secret; but at the same time, happyRowley, the desire to see you once more was lurking in the hearts of both ladies, and that was growing strongly enough in itself. Nothing less now than nectar be our beverage, and ambrosia be our meat."

He clapped his hands, and as he did so the trees and foliage seemed to become animated, and to change into a sumptuous table, covered with the choicest fruit and the rarest wines.

"This is indeed witchcraft!" cried Rowley, in high glee.

"For all that the fairy will not compel the mountain to come to Mohammed, and so Mohammed will have to come to the mountain. I propose that the table be brought here."

This proposition was seconded and supported, and all hands—Rowley and the "goddesses" excepted—rushed towards the magic bower. Rowley was prettily chatting with Louise and Sarah, who, harmonizing more than ever, seemed to have no other design than to convince the cruel one of the glorious past, and of the painfulness of their farewell. Will had meanwhile filled the glasses from the decanters on the table, and taken advantage of Rowley's busy conversation to pour a few drops of rum into his glass, which was intended to give the nectar additional bouquet and vigour.

All of them sat down; the conversation became animated, almost to noisiness. Rowley became merrier and wittier, so at least he was told by all of them; they received all his sallies with loud applause, as they emptied their brimming glasses.

"I hope you will take good care of Jack when I am gone," said Louise, as seriously as possible, but yet incapable of concealing the irony which pervaded her droll anxiety about a monkey. "Two millions of *livres*, in hard cash, have been shipped at Calais," whispered she into Charles's ear, "consigned to my address, good friend!"

Did Charles hear her? He seemed entirely under the spell of Lady Castlemaine, who was as loving and languishing as in the first hour of their mutual affection.

"Now for the song, Will, which you promised us yesterday; our witty Louise is sure to answer

you." Rowley's articulation was no longer very easy, but his eyes sparkled with animation, and his cheeks glowed with joy.

Buckingham began :

"There lived a grand old monarch,
His realm was wide and fair ;
There lived a grand old monarch,
With him could none compare.

"Of Mars he had the visage,
And Vulcan's strength and fire,
And many were the subjects
Who claim'd him for their sire.

"Foremost he honour'd beauty,
And next to beauty, gold ;
The lady and the guinea
They ne'er grew dull or old.

"For both had brief existence,
Even as the tender grass ;
She thro' his heart would slip, and
They thro' his purse would pass."

"Bravo, bravissimo !" shouted Rowley.

"Milford, it is time ; take care that nobody sees you, and, above all, be unctuous and serious," whispered Buckingham into his neighbour's ears.

"Now then, Louise, it is your turn to reply. Just complete the picture of that King, you know."

"Of the great king," whispered Lady Castlemaine.

"Thank you, Sarah. Come along, Louise, are you getting ready ?"

"I will merely relate what was the testimony of posterity."

"Are you mad ? That I have known ever so long ago !"

"Only you don't know the epitaph, Rowley. Listen:

"The land was all in sable,
The little birds grew dumb,
For ah! the grand old monarch
His end at last has come.

"Then on his tomb was written,
By one who knew his bent,—
A faithful friend and servant,
And peer of parliament:

"'Where shall we find his equal?
Oh, well your tears may flow!
He was the face of the watch, and we
The hands that made it go.'"

"Brava," cried Charles, whilst the others were silent until the mark of royal approbation had sufficiently encouraged them to give vent to their feelings.

"Louise, that's witty enough, but it is not true. They are the 'hands,' or would be so at least, but that's what we shall not allow, shall we Louise? We shall send them home again, shan't we Louise? Well, let us drive to Covent Garden. Let us—let us—"

There he stopped short; the pupil of his eye was fixed upon one single point; his hand was pointing for a moment with the forefinger, but then it dropped down, just as he did himself, into the arms of Lady Castlemaine.

There, on the amphitheatre, amidst those flowers and leaves, now withered and faded, amidst broken glasses and empty bottles, amidst that scene of revelry and confusion, purposely brought about by Buckingham, stood a woman dressed in black, a woman looking more like a marble statue with the light falling sideways upon her dismal and sorrowful face.

It was Mary, whom Milford had induced to leave her apartments under the pretext that the King was in great danger, in a danger which he did not exactly describe, but from which she might still save him, a danger so imminent that he had fallen down upon his knees when she wavered, and entreated her, with tears in his eyes, to follow him immediately, since every minute of delay might make it impossible to save his Majesty. Kate was not at hand, and, consequently, she could not inform her. At last Mary made up her mind to go. Was she not everywhere under the protection of her heavenly Father, and had not His hand conducted her along the most marvellous ways to a goal more glorious and sacred than she had ever ventured to think of?

She went, and there she stood, gazing upon the scene of revelry, looking upon that banqueting company, with their bewildered eyes and glowing cheeks, with their insane laughter and senseless hilarity, and, in the midst of all, the King of England, whom she imagined nearer to heaven, through her preaching of the words of eternal life, the King whom it was her solemn calling to remind of his sacred duties towards his heavenly Lord and Ruler. And—horror of horrors! —by his side were sitting the very priestesses of Baal, who had caused him to wander away from Jehovah, who had dragged him on to the slough of all unrighteousness. But the Lord God did not seem to will that he should be lost. He had once more called her to support the wavering sinner, to call the wanderer back. The stranger who had warned her was a friend of the King indeed; he had been right in speaking of imminent danger, and he expected help and assistance

from her hands. The stranger—it was Milford, who had quietly stolen away on receiving the hint of Buckingham—had followed her as far as the threshold, but concealed himself now behind the shrubs and flowers. He, however, remained sufficiently within reach to make her hear the whisper in which he stirred her: "Save him, save him!"

At these words she conquered her feeling of horror, and began to approach the table. There she stopped, like the lily bending its unsullied chalice over the filthy pond, facing the ghastly, pale monarch, who seemed to have sought protection in the arms of Lady Castlemaine.

"The Lord is a jealous God, King of England, and He suffers no idols by His side. Loosen yourself from the arms of those Philistine women, and do penance."

"Brava, brava, brava!" shouted Buckingham; and the impression of Mary's solemn words was altogether lost; to the King the prophetess seemed to have become an actress.

"She is a pretty child," said Louise, as she quietly fanned herself with her ivory fan; "pity indeed that she is deranged. Was that your goddess? nay, Charles!" A curious little smile accompanied these words, which, insignificant as it was, fell heavily upon his heart.

"Mary Hollis!" said he, not without difficulty, "what is your business here?"

"She wishes to share our pleasures. Mary, come and sit down with us," said Buckingham, now stepping forward. As she recognised him she turned aside with horror. "How so, my pretty pet, won't

you renew the acquaintance? Do you think that a king is better after all than a duke?"

"Will," cried Charles, "do not touch her!"

"Let her sit down with us," whispered Lady Castlemaine; "I shall not be jealous."

"King of England!" said Mary, emphatically, when at last she had recovered her speech, "leave the realm of Satan; come with me."

He had scarcely heard her words; he had listened more to Lady Castlemaine, who, with all the tact of a connoisseur, had called his attention to the extraordinary beauty of that child, who preferred him now even to Buckingham.

"Dearest Mary!" cried he, "you err, indeed you do; this is not the realm of Satan. Come, Mary, sit down with us."

"Be more humble still," whispered Louise; "fall down upon your knees, Charles."

"Mary, it is my desire that you should come here." Buckingham was about to carry out the King's command, but Charles, who was jealously watching every one of his movements, forestalled him by rushing towards the amphitheatre. She turned aside, raised her eyes in despair, and hurried away, ever more quickly since she had noticed the distorted features of the revelling King. She ran onward, as she thought, by the same way she had come, but she soon perceived her error. In the distance sounded the laughter of elated hilarity, and to her it sounded like the shouts of victory from hell, for the Evil One had triumphed, although the King had obeyed her voice and followed her till now. That he had returned to that corrupted atmosphere was evidence against the inward conversion

in which Mary had gradually begun to believe. Suddenly the scales fell from her eyes; she discovered with bleeding heart and crushed energy that she had been pursuing a mere chimera.

To return to her apartments was impossible. Her labour had proved in vain. She had nothing more to hope for; she had nothing more to do. But whither could she go? To Dickens in the middle of the night? It was not pride that withheld her, for her pride was now crushed. No, she would go to him and confess to him that he had been wiser than she was, but that she would do to-morrow. For this night only she wished to find a shelter, but one where she might be hidden and protected from the King of England. She remembered the words of the unknown lady who had also been wiser than herself, who had foretold to her what had now come to pass, and who had offered her a shelter. That woman loved *him!* But was not everything lost and gone by for ever? She bowed her head, but once more rose the shouts of laughter; nay, the sound seemed to approach. She had no time to consider any longer, she had to act; and she went onward. She asked the first person she met to show her Miss Kennedy's apartments. This request having been complied with, she entreated that lady to take her at once to her mistress: she begged so earnestly for admission, and apologized so eloquently for her untimely visit, that when at last she gave the name of Mary Hollis her prayer was granted, and she found herself face to face with the unknown woman who had visited her. The lady was sitting by the bedside of an invalid, and made her a friendly sign to approach.

CHAPTER IX.

CROSS DESIGNS AND FRIENDLY ALLIANCES.

THE tidings of Cromwell's death had hardly created such excitement and surprise among the cavaliers and adherents of the House of Stuart, as the news spread in the early morning of what had happened at Whitehall during the night. The first rumour proceeded from a single lackey, but as he was wanting in details, and made up for his deficiency by drawing somewhat largely upon his imagination, his tale was hardly credited; very soon, however, other voices re-echoed and confirmed his report, and at last some one stepped forward who had overheard Lady Castlemaine in her old apartments speaking to her faithful Kate. Every doubt was finally cleared up when my lady left her own saloon *in propriâ personâ* to be present at the King's levee. Haughtily and gravely did she pass along the rows of bowing courtiers, until she vouchsafed to stop for a minute before the Duke of Monmouth.

"I really think you have grown, Harry," whispered she into his ear.

"And I fancy you have been mourning, my lady."

"So I have, my brave knight; but where is your friend Sidney, and your other companion?"

"The former could not have possibly suspected that you would remember his name, or else he would have been here. The latter, my lady, has been mourning like yourself, but his tears may perhaps be dried simultaneously with yours?"

"Do you really think so? But surely *you* would have been able to console him?"

"I feel honoured by the idea that I should be able to do what even Lady Castlemaine could not succeed in doing. However, I do not aspire to the high distinction of being placed upon a level with Lady Castlemaine."

"You are very modest, Harry. You really improve as you grow in years. But you speak very coolly of your friend. I hope he has not given his faithful Monmouth any cause or reason to complain."

"Not so much, at all events, as he did to Lady Castlemaine."

Lord Arlington approached slowly, and entered into conversation with a few noblemen that were nearest. However that statesman might rejoice at the idea that his Majesty had entirely shaken off the pernicious influence that had governed him of late, still he was no more at ease than the others. The change was too sudden to last. The two royal mistresses had again been received into favour, but it was not known yet whether the girl who had supplanted them both had left. Hence it was that my lady, who was so very anxious to enjoy her triumph, met with less homage than she expected or was entitled to. Hence it was that she could not help noticing how the wavering diplomatist merely ventured in her presence without actually facing her. It was as if she divined the thought

that seemed to occupy everybody's mind, as if she wished to ease the wavering doubtful courtiers. She left the presence of the young man who had not yet learned to guard his sharp tongue, and who saw no danger in rendering her tit for tat. She suddenly turned round to Arlington, before he had time to go out of her way, with a courteous bow.

"One moment only, my lord! I will not rob you of your valuable time."

"My time becomes only valuable when I have the pleasure of being in your ladyship's presence."

"Gallant, as we know your lordship to be: there will not be a single enemy for England left to fight. You slay them all by your courtesy. But, my lord, if you could spare me a few minutes by and bye? do grant my request. Have the kindness to visit me then in the room next to my boudoir. It was formerly the abode of my maid, and afterwards that of the Yorkshire lass, and the latter has so filled her sanctuary with the incense of her holiness that I have made up my mind to live there for some time."

"And has the Yorkshire lass moved to your ladyship's boudoir?" asked Arlington, half affirmatively.

"She prefers the open air, and may be lodged by this time in the streets of London, with which no doubt she is quite familiar."

The nobles approached one after the other, and almost broke through the Court etiquette by forming a circle round her ladyship and the Secretary of State. How my lady did enjoy her triumph! What contemptuous looks did she cast upon those that surrounded her, upon those who, as they convinced themselves of her power, received at once the inward assurance that

it was necessary to court her favours. It entered nobody's mind how indelicate was the manner in which she enjoyed her triumph, nor how she set her foot upon the slain, and covered her with mud. There was not one present there who pitied the unfortunate victim, for nobody had ever received any favour through her, and no one had the remotest idea of what that child had attempted. Only one feeling came over all; it was as if they had rid themselves of a strait waistcoat; it was to them as if the sky had at last been cleared of its heavy, threatening clouds. No more sabbatarianism, no more abstaining from their favourite pursuits. If my lady had done nothing else it would have entitled her to their homage.

My ladyship listened to these now overt protestations of submissive friendship first with evident satisfaction, then with patronizing pride, and at last with impatience. She looked everywhere about her, and it became obvious whom she sought when Charles Digby entered, and was going to take his place among the double row of courtiers. She watched him closely for a moment. Where was that healthy, ruddy cheek? Where was that expression of freshness and strength, at one time sparkling in those clear and lively eyes, and playing on those red and well-shaped lips? It was as if the young man had grown ten years older, as if he were consumed by an inward fire. She had noticed how his lips trembled for a moment when his eyes happened to meet hers, and how he took his place in the back rows as if he wished to hide himself. But this was not what my lady desired.

She advanced without his perceiving it, and when at last she had approached him, and he was about to change

his place again, she called him loudly by his name. A sudden blush overspread his ghastly pale features.

"Mr. Digby, we do not forget our friends, nay, we recognise them, however changed, and you *are* changed! Perhaps you have too heavy drill practice?" She had come quite close to him by this time, and when she nodded very significantly to the courtiers around, they modestly withdrew, and left her alone with Charles. How willingly would he have withdrawn himself in order to escape what he looked upon as an insult in open court. He would not pass any longer for the favourite of that woman, but what he was so anxious to avoid was exactly what she wished to proclaim before all the world. She was desirous of fastening the old bond, or at least she wished to make every one believe that the young man was hers, as before.

"How is it you are so gloomy, Charles? Do you fear my vengeance because of your many little infidelities? Dread nothing, my friend; my exile has not been thrown away upon me; it has raised me above such weaknesses. I have been cruel towards you, but I intend to make amends for what I have done, and to render you happier than ever. Come to me by and bye, Charles, and we will talk of our love. I know the black-eyed lady with the magnificent raven locks. She has become more intimate and more indulgent towards you. Well, my friend, you do not answer? Surely she has not proved faithless to you? I suppose you have often seen her of late?"

"My lady, do you know where Mary Hollis is?" asked he, with cold politeness.

"Charles, is it for her that you have forgotten the woman whom you loved so tenderly?"

"I do not speak, my lady, either of my love or of my contempt for her or for anybody else, but I merely inquire after the unfortunate girl who has been driven away from here during the course of this night. Whither is she gone? You must know, you who always took so much interest in her."

"That is meant for reproach, I suppose? Come to me by and bye, and I may be able to give you a hint perhaps. Will you, in your own interest, Charles?"

"His Majesty does not receive anybody this morning," announced the chamberlain on the threshold of the room which led to his Majesty's bedchamber.

Charles took advantage of the confusion thus created to leave her ladyship with a coldly ceremonious bow. The latter, who had been struck with another thought since the announcement of the chamberlain, did not keep him any longer, but merely repeated in a patronizing tone her invitation to come to her by and bye.

She approached the chamberlain, who received her with a low bow, but repeated that his Majesty received nobody. She was passing on, as if the order did not concern her, when he was obliged to tell her, not without some embarrassment, and in his gentlest whisper, that his Majesty was not alone. "Her Grace the Duchess of Portsmouth is with him."

"That is an additional reason for me to pay his Majesty a visit. I take all responsibility upon myself, my lord."

She passed by, and soon found herself face to face with his Majesty and Louise de Quérouaille. The latter had acted somewhat differently from her rival under the existing circumstances. It was not her in-

tention to enjoy her triumph, but rather to confirm it. While my lady, after a short night's rest, had hastened to appear before the whole court assembled, she had gone without the slightest ostentation to the King's bed-chamber, so that she might be present at his awaking, and be able to lead his thoughts. She had naturally expected that the great excitement of the preceding night would be followed by an equally great exhaustion, and she feared that in these moments he might come to a resolution that would cause all the ground that had been gained to be lost again.

She had modestly taken a seat by the side of the royal bed, and in her tender care she had prepared a glass of the purest water with a few refreshing drops of lemon in it. When the King at last awoke he looked up in surprise, yawned, and threw himself back upon his pillows again.

"Have you slept well, Charles?" asked she, offering him the cooling beverage which her loving hand had prepared.

Now only did he seem to remember what had happened. He nodded, and asked where Sarah was. Louise first bit her lips, and replied that her friend no doubt was still in her slumbers. She noticed indeed with some uneasiness that he was still under the influence of my lady's caresses, and that he was merely counterbalancing her ladyship's love with the loss of that strange maiden. As far as she had been able to reconnoitre, the work which the young Yorkshire girl had begun in her fanatic zeal had been taken up and continued, for obvious political reasons, by Shaftesbury and the so-called National Party. Charles had been thrown by them into the arms of his Parliament;

they were endeavouring to make him independent of the subsidies of His Most Christian Majesty, and then he would be able to do without Louise de Quérouaille, for she indulged in no illusion whatsoever as to the real nature of his love for her. Very soon after her arrival on English soil it had become evident to her that Lady Castlemaine remained the favourite from affection, and that she was the favourite from self-interest. As the latter might safely consider herself to be more sure of her position, Louise had always been satisfied with the kind of worship of which she was the object. But now that the cause of self-interest had ceased to exist, now that she owed her restoration merely to the whimsical Duke of Buckingham, who had rendered her a service because he dreaded the complete triumph of a favourite who might become dangerous to him, now only was it that she began to fear for her own power and for the influence of her rival.

"Where is she? Where is Mary?" asked Charles, after having passed a few moments in painful meditation.

"The rumour goes, Charles, that she is presiding at a synod of Nonconformists, in which the question of your penance is the subject under discussion. How did you dare to be merry too! But, my friend, Lord Arlington has been here, and Lauderdale, and Clifford also with a book full of figures, all sums for you to try your hand at."

"I hope you have sent them all away. I have got a very bad headache."

"I anticipated your wishes. We had better take a walk by and bye to the Serpentine. It is such glorious

weather! That will do you good. I forgot to tell you that the actors and actresses have arrived from Versailles with the newest plays and ballets. They are at your Majesty's command for a month."

Here the lord-chamberlain came to remind his Majesty that the hour for the levee had come, and received the order which we have seen already executed.

The prospect of the French theatricals appeared to rouse Charles from his dreams and gloomy thoughts. He spoke of getting up, and was already dressing with her Grace's assistance, in the absence of the chamberlain, when Lady Castlemaine entered to join them.

"Good morning, Sarah," cried he, by way of welcome, as he waved his hand. This reception was not quite so cool as Louise's.

"I did not expect to find you so early in the morning in such excellent company. Her Grace has forestalled me in her anxiety, if not about your night's rest, at least about your awaking."

"You have so often forestalled others, my dear friend," replied Louise, with a friendly smile.

"How blue the sky is to-day!" said Charles.

"And it will not be our fault if it does not remain unclouded. We have suffered and mourned together when we saw you no longer, and we have learned to feel that if ever the sun should shine again upon us, we should also together surround you with our loving cares, have we not, Barbara?"

The latter readily assented: she too was in an amiable mood, and spoke of nothing else but of her desire for his Majesty's happiness, in the same way as Louise. The latter, to give at once a sign of her friendly dis-

position, made her rival acquainted with the plan just proposed to his Majesty concerning the French troupe, a plan in which my lady fully concurred. Both were of one opinion in this respect, that Charles should not be left a moment's time to reflect; he wanted pleasure, enjoyment, and diversion. This was a tacit understanding between the two amiable friends.

"But where is Mary, Barbara?" asked the King, suddenly, as her ladyship was engaged in perfuming his Majesty's wig with a scented powder.

"I do not know, Rowley; but if you feel interested I will endeavour to get some information about it."

"Yes, do, pray!"

The two women looked at each other.

"I have sinned but once, and I am sure to find a scripture text to atone for that, so as to ease her conscience. Why should she not remain here? I do so like a trio."

There was a gentle rap at the door, and Hugh, the old whip, entered, visibly surprised or dismayed at the sight of the two ladies. After some hesitation which provoked general curiosity, he was obliged to assign a cause for his unexpected morning call. "Viper had broken from his chain, and brought him a wonderful present. He had found him that morning more playful than ever, so much so that he almost drove the spaniels mad in their kennels; at last he had laid down something at his feet, a piece of leather that seemed almost like a glove. He did not know whether it might belong to his Majesty, and therefore he had brought it hither, torn and sullied as it was, showing but little of its original form and shape."

"My good, overhonest Hugh, such treasures you may henceforth keep to yourself."

"Why, but——"

"What is the matter?"

"If that glove is not your Majesty's," observed my lady, "then it must be somebody else's. That's what Hugh meant to say, I suppose," and her ladyship looked very significantly at the King.

"Just so, my lady. I do not know where the glove can have been picked up, it may be near that little boat which I see sometimes in the pond."

"Can it be that somebody visits the royal pack by night?" asked Louise, who evidently did not understand the meaning and import of all these petty communications.

Charles looked at Barbara, and the latter nodded. He would not hear anything more however, and sent Hugh away with the abrupt intimation, "that he would soon be down himself." A new visitor, and it was evident that he was a welcome one, Mad Will, came into the room, and at once attracted his Majesty's attention. Buckingham's face bore the unmistakeable signs of last night's brawl, whatever he had done to conceal it. It had cost him a great effort to get up, and to walk to Whitehall, but he knew too well what kind of company Rowley ought to have for the next few days. He listened with approving smiles to the plans already made; he thought the whole Court ought to go out in cavalcade, with the band of the Guards at the head, for the good London people had not had anything of late to amuse themselves; he twitted Rowley once more with his conversion; he conferred the old and favourite title upon him of the jolliest brother of the

private Club; he treated him to a few pages from the *chronique scandaleuse* of the day; and chased at last the clouds that were still lowering over his Majesty's countenance.

Buckingham asked "a few minutes" of her ladyship "on account of private matters," as he assured his Majesty, who seemed loth to part with either of them.

"We leave your Majesty one of the finest pearls of the crown," said Buckingham, intending by these words to give Louise a hint not to leave the King alone.

"I have reason to believe," said the pretty *Française*, "that your Majesty gives the preference to large diamonds."

The tone in which she addressed his Majesty was far from amiable; she observed with growing anxiety the increasing influence of her rival. Charles had overwhelmed the latter with so many proofs of his affection—with as many as he could in her presence; and the mighty Duke of Buckingham, to whom both were indebted for their incipient triumph, had asked Barbara for a private interview. The time had come for her to act. Either Lady Castlemaine or herself must come to a fall, and Buckingham, who still owed her a grudge—although he so cleverly concealed it wherever required—Buckingham should be her ally. She might have waited another critical moment to make more sure of her blow, but her calm look acknowledged the imminence of the rising danger. Nothing betrayed any of her inward emotions, which she rather concealed under her usual nonchalance and raillery, of which Charles had been deprived for so

long a time that it kept him for a moment under the spell of novelty. Her Grace remained until Arlington and the French Ambassador came to take her place. She could safely trust his Majesty to these two substitutes, and so she took her departure. On reaching her apartments she sent a confidential messenger to a person we have never met there yet, and whom we could hardly have expected to find in her elegant boudoir. Old Kate entered gently and mysteriously, and her countenance was more cunning and crafty than ever.

That old woman, generally feared, although despised, as the worthy factotum of Lady Castlemaine, had shed bitter tears during the course of that night at the return of her old mistress, who had spoken to her in the same familiar tone of command as if all had been a dream. She had learned to love the poor deserted child, and willingly stayed with her when my lady went to Oxford. And now the latter had come back, and her first indirect act had been the flight of Mary. Old Kate gnashed her teeth with rage. She had been thinking a moment of going in search of Mary, but of what avail would it be to bring the fugitive back when she could not regain her former influence? Poor old woman! she had the power to do evil, not to do good, and the former only for or against Lady Castlemaine. The grudge which the maid had owed so long to the mistress had now grown within her bosom into a feeling of deadly hatred which she could scarcely conceal.

It was at this juncture that she received her Grace of Portsmouth's message, which she hastened to obey. The invitation itself did not seem to surprise her, and the way to the apartments of the Duchess

appeared familiar enough. She was gladly welcomed by the latter with the mysterious words, breathed in a scarcely audible whisper, "Kate, now is the time!"

Kate seemed perfectly to understand her, and replied, "I am ready; I have been ready for a long time."

"Tom Buddie shall be warned. I will take care that you shall no longer have any need to serve her."

"I have your Grace's promise?"

"You are made the housekeeper of Hatfield Manor, whither you go to-morrow."

"I thank your Grace; but even without any reward I should have been willing to serve you."

The Duchess was watching the old woman's face, every feature of which was stamped with hatred and contempt. She was perfectly easy on that score, and did not fear any disappointment.

"He is now with her, Kate! We could never select a better opportunity," said the Duchess. She opened a secret drawer of her escritoire, whence she took a small box and delivered it to Kate.

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"Who would have prophesied the day before yesterday, Barbara, that we should have such a cosy chat in your elegant boudoir to-day?" said Buckingham, who felt very comfortable on the soft couch which my lady had given up to her guest.

"I shall never forget, George, to whom I owe that."

"I did not mean to extort words of gratitude. If a slight feeling of rancour should still lurk at the bot-

tom of your large and generous heart, owing to my apparent indecision in helping you, I am willing to give you all possible satisfaction. I confess that I felt annoyed by your coolness when I brought that young jackanapes from Hallam."

"And also, George, because you did not wish to make me too proud after my triumph, nor Madame Carwell too jealous of me."

"I do not think, with regard to the latter, that I should trouble myself much about it. I saw her grow pale with spite when we left together just now."

"You have taught both of us a lesson of discretion; pray, just accept a few hints yourself. You defy her jealousy? My kind friend, that is merely with an afterthought. We know each other by this time, and, just to give you a proof of it, I will attempt to guess your thoughts. Sarah has taken the most active part in the struggle, and therefore the greatest power is hers; Sarah has personally great influence over Rowley, and consequently she is the best to make use of. *Ergo*, George Villiers comes to Sarah to ask her for a favour? What do you think of my logic?"

"A favour? You have hardly profited yet by my lessons of discretion. One good turn deserves another, especially if the one is likely to be followed by many more. Remember, Sarah, that much yet remains to be done."

"Well, George, let us hear what—only be quick, I have not much time."

"They have apprehended a poor devil, not to make the rascal swing, but to strike a blow at me."

"What's his name?"

"Dick Wharton; he is a reckless scoundrel who—"

"Might get you into a scrape?"

"I do not trust Shaftesbury at all. He is endeavouring to take advantage of the King's blunder in calling Parliament together, and asking them for grants."

"You may be right there."

"Well, you are opposed to Louise, opposed to French politics, and therefore on the side of Shaftesbury. Assure him of your support, on condition that he nips the affair of Dick Wharton in the bud, and allows the blackguard to escape."

"Ah, well," said Barbara, throwing herself back in her chair, and looking at him with a sarcastic smile; "is that what you want? Well, we'll see about it."

"Sarah, no foolish rancour. I am the first to hold out my hand; if you refuse I offer it to Louise, who will be glad to accept it."

"I do not refuse at all, only I have a few conditions."

"What are they?"

"That you deny yourself for ever the pleasure of offering your hand to the pretty and charming Louise. She must go, and the opportunity is a favourable one; Charles needs her no longer, and is willing to set himself free from Versailles. We must risk the attack together, and if we succeed, we must not cause her to be exiled to Hatfield Manor, but to be shipped from Dover at once. Would it not be nice for you to see her off, after your act of friendship in bringing me the news of her being made a Duchess?" Lady Castlemaine was too passionate a woman to be able to feign, she exposed herself by far too much to Buckingham for the latter not to have observed what was going

on within her, and how all his petty defalcations were passing in review through her memory. But for all that he needed her influence; it had become necessary to him.

"I promise you," said he, "that she shall be sent away."

"And as soon as she has crossed the pier of Dover I will convince Shaftesbury of his folly in prosecuting you. By that time, the French influence being crushed, it would be superfluous to drive you out of the country."

"Just as you like, Sarah. Only the complaints of Parliament may begin before that time, and Wharton may have had recourse to a tissue of lies, in order to screen himself. It is not so much a question of French or English influence as one of Shaftesbury and Buckingham. The former will triumph if ever I fall."

"Is that a *sine quâ non?* I must just wound your vanity a little. I see that you are impatient, but that suits my plan, which is equally pressing. This very night Madame Carwell must start for Dover, George. You have no time whatever to lose."

The door was hurriedly opened, and Kate rushed into the room with a glittering jewel in her hand.

"At last, my lady! the ring of——" She stopped short as she recognised the Duke.

"Who bade you come here? Go, impudent vixen!" cried her ladyship, with angry looks.

"My ring! How has that woman got possession of my ring?—of the ring which I lost to the man that was to be my assassin. Just show me. Yes, it is the same. Has that ring been handed over to you, my lady?"

"I do not understand anything about it. The vixen is either deranged or intoxicated."

"I am neither the one nor the other, although the many years passed in your service might have driven anybody mad."

"I should advise you to hold your tongue," cried my lady, with threatening looks. "She has been in conspiracy with Madame Carwell, and wishes to make you believe that it was I who aimed at your life. Get you gone, vixen!"

"Directly, my lady, as soon as I have justified myself in his Grace's eyes. It was Tom Buddie who brought you that ring, and got two hundred pounds for it."

"Was that all I was worth, my good Barbara?" asked Buckingham. His lips had assumed a livid hue, and a strange fire was sparkling in his eyes.

"You are joking, George."

"I hope your Grace will not think that I am the guilty party. My lady arranged everything with Tom Buddie in my presence. I swore that I would never speak about it, but now I am obliged to. If your Grace should be very anxious to see Tom Buddie he can be sent for, for he has not been hanged, as originally intended. Oh, my lady, I should have wished to see him swing by the side of the rioters. It would have been better for many of us."

My lady had more than once attempted to interrupt her officious maid; but Buckingham, who listened with great interest to the old woman's information, had just as often prevented her ladyship.

"You lie, old hag! Madame Carwell has——"

"Oh dear, no! I believe it was Tommy's doing. It

is quite by accident that I have found out who stole his Grace's ring from your ladyship's boudoir."

"That'll do, my good woman. Give me the ring; next to Red Jack I have got the greatest claim on it. I intend to wear it as a delightful souvenir of my lady's friendship. Was that the reason why I should start for the northern counties? How shamefully you have been deceived, Barbara Palmer! First, they make you pay the two hundred pounds, and then I turn up after all! For that money you might have ordered a splendid costume for one of your actors, and left him a souvenir into the bargain. My faithful friend, my kind Barbara, I intend to show you how I sympathise with you in your disappointment."

"Confound the *contre-temps!*" murmured he, as he hurried along the galleries. "I should have known it sooner or later. The slimy venomous reptile! Unless I crush her altogether I shall never be sure of my existence."

My lady did not flatter herself with any illusions as to the mood in which Buckingham had left her. She felt that there was an impassable gulf between them, a hostile feeling unto death. Kate was turned out of her service immediately; she left with a disgusting oath on her lips, and with these words of coarse but energetic prophecy, "You shall suffer for what you have caused Mary Hollis to feel; may my sins be visited threefold upon your cursed head!"

My lady could not for a moment realize the manifold blows that had been struck at her. Only one thought predominated over all the others; she ought to anticipate Buckingham in his revenge. He had himself exposed the spot where he was vulnerable, and there the blow must be struck.

Full of anxiety she paced up and down her boudoir. She was still waiting for young Digby, and she had given him such a pressing invitation to call. She made up her mind not to wait any longer, but if possible to surprise him in his own retreat, as she had done once before. Kate, the treacherous hag, was gone, and consequently my lady was her own maid and mistress. Charles was not at home, but John was. From the latter she learned that his master would not be back for the day; "he was staying with his father, and had told him even that he need not expect him the whole night." The honest servant had no idea of having said anything wrong, but still he had not rendered a service to his young master. Her ladyship, at all events, drew an inference of her own from his words, although her looks did not betray anything.

She was merry and chatty on the morning ride to the park, only she avoided the presence of Louise as carefully as the latter was sedulous in lavishing protestations of friendship upon her. The wound struck by Kate was still fresh and bleeding. Kate, in whom she had implicitly trusted; Kate, whom she had looked upon as her property, with which she could do what she liked, Kate had for many months been the property of Madame Carwell. Kate had betrayed her, and stolen those jewels at Louise's instigation, in order that the only evidence of her design on Buckingham should not be lost. These thoughts caused her blood to rush quicker through her veins. Was the delicate, tiny, gossiping *Française*, then, her superior in everything?

After dinner she feigned a violent headache, and excused herself from attending the representation of the French *troupe*. She sent for Hugh, whom she in-

formed that there was to be another nightly visit near the boat or in the garden; that he was to keep a watchful eye upon the person that would make his appearance, not however to disturb him in any way, but to let her know at once when he was there. He would be well rewarded, and his wages would be doubled immediately.

In the evening Lord Shaftesbury went to see my lady by her own invitation. He went with the firm resolution not to trust the cunning woman, and to be on his guard, but what was his surprise when he found in her ladyship not a foe, but an ally who entered into all his plans, and encouraged him in his energy. She that had laid the corner-stone of the great work, Mary, had suddenly disappeared; she seemed to have looked upon the struggle as a hopeless one, but what little she *had* wrought, Shaftesbury had made subservient to his politics, and that might be continued yet. Nobody, not even the head of the National Party, was yet aware of the extent to which the necessary course of events would lead; but to everybody it was evident that the general corruption of the Court should be attacked, first of all, in the person of Buckingham. In order to do so effectually one should not tread upon any personal ground; he should not be assailed as a corrupter of the morals, not as the cause of all extravagance, but as a transgressor of the laws of the land, as a rebel against the three estates. Thus Lord Strafford had been dealt with before, and afterwards the Chancellor Clarendon; the former had paid with his head, and the latter had been outlawed. It was with this ulterior view that the abduction of a humble country girl was to be made into a matter for serious

investigation. Since the victim, however powerful and influential, had refused to utter a single complaint, had not vouchsafed to give any information whatsoever, Shaftesbury and his henchmen had used every possible means in their power to procure circumstantial evidence; then, if the time had come, the victim herself would be compelled to appear as a living witness. The information already obtained had led to the apprehension of Dick Wharton.

From the depositions of that man, however, it appeared that he had been a mere tool in another man's hand, and that man they could not touch. When Shaftesbury left my lady, he had learned as much as he wished, and much more than he hoped. He had obtained certainty about who it was that had carried out the abduction by order of Buckingham; the name of Red Jack was made a note of, and that very evening the order was signed to apprehend him, and to send him up to London under a strong escort.

Buckingham had become the implacable foe of Lady Castlemaine, but the latter had every reason to suppose that she would ruin him, just in time to escape the effects of his revenge.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE *versus* LOVE.

MARY had abandoned all ideas about her mission when she fled from the presence of the King and his companions. The latter act might surprise the courtiers, or even the mistresses, but that proved only that they had never understood Mary's intentions. Had she aspired to power and influence for her own interest's sake, had the piety which she assumed merely been a pretext, then assuredly she would not have abandoned the struggle as a hopeless one yet: then, with the means that were still at her command, she might yet have been able to influence the King, who asked for her as soon as he awoke, who felt a desire to see her in his state of depression and exhaustion.

We know that the maiden's endeavours had been of a higher and nobler character; we know her as a fanatic, but as one from whom we cannot withhold our homage and our respect, as one who made a dreadful discovery for herself when she so suddenly found out that the man to whom she had been preaching repentance, the man whom she held to be on the right path, had again returned to his old and sinful ways. No, his soul had never been renewed, that man had never heard

the voice of God! He was still the same; he might perhaps afterwards repent of that evening's revelry, but then he would fall again at the first temptation, and fall and repent and fall again to the end. To follow up God's commandments was to him no bliss, no pleasure, but on the contrary, an intolerable burden, an unceasing crucifixion of the desire that always consumed him. At this moment it never struck her that she was herself to blame for having listened to that unknown friend of Dickens, or that, by so doing, she had hurried matters on to a crisis; and yet she had judged better than the Prince of Orange, when he insisted upon the removal of the two mistresses; her judgment had been less biassed than his, because she aimed merely at the salvation of the King's soul, whereas he strove after a political end, after an object which he might have more safely reached had he pursued it with that moderation of zeal that characterized his Highness in after life.

When the fumes of his intoxication had been sufficiently dissipated for Charles Stuart to remember everything that had happened, he had caused researches to be secretly made as to the maiden's whereabouts, with the intention of imploring her pardon; had she been found again at this moment he would have raised her to rank and position. But no trace of her could be discovered, and a few hours later Charles Stuart was again so much entangled in the silken nets of temptation that he had no longer time to think of her.

Mary had meanwhile been living in the apartments of the unknown lady. Miss Kennedy—the Alice of our virtuous John—always spoke with so much regard of that unknown lady, and treated her with so much respect, that Mary could not but believe in the high

rank of her protectress. She took her to be one of the maids of honour to the Queen, a lady descended at least from one of the noblest families of England, and a feeling of bliss suddenly came over her, but it was only to give way immediately to one of oppressive anxiety. No doubt Charles was separated from her by a wide gulf, but yet he was desirous to pass it.

She had asked Alice for the name of her noble mistress, but she had met with no satisfactory reply. On the following morning the high-born personage came herself to see her. The lady's bearing was just as embarrassing as on the occasion of her first visit; she even cast down her eyes before Mary's submissive look, notwithstanding the friendly manner in which she begged her to sit down.

"I warned you, my child, that you undertook an impossible work," whispered she, as if she feared that the sound of her voice might pierce the *portière* of cloth which partitioned this room from the adjoining one.

"It has not been in God's design to shame your prophecy," replied she, not without difficulty.

"Disappointment has depressed your spirits, Miss Hollis. You should bow before the will of God."

"I am trying," and she burst into tears as she continued: "pardon me, my lady, I feel that the work was beyond my strength. I *will* bow before His will."

The unknown lady looked at her for awhile with evident compassion; she endeavoured to console her by the assurance that no earthly power would have been able to succeed, that the King had gone too far astray; but Mary looked so strangely at her that she felt unable to proceed any further.

"Is it possible that you do not consider yourself defeated yet?"

"There can be no question of *my* defeat, because I have never been fighting for myself," replied Mary; "but I forget that any other tone but that of the vanquished would be scarcely becoming in me. If I have at all wounded you, my lady, by my free utterance of speech on the occasion of your first visit, I humbly beg that you will forgive me. Oh, my lady, you must have had full confidence in me when you allowed me to ask for Miss Kennedy, in case I should require your assistance!" The exclamation, uttered in a moment of vexation, was imprudent and even implied an innuendo.

The other understood her too well, and did not answer. It was not until after a while that she asked her *protégée* what she intended to do.

"I will go back whence I came. God has been pleased to humble my sinful pride, but He will hear my prayer, so that I may dwell in the land where I was brought up. One favour only, my lady. The journey to Hallam, although certainly not an expensive one, is too expensive for me."

"Have you been left in such a state of penury?" exclaimed my lady, and her tone of surprise was evidently one of admiration. She mused for a few moments, after which she answered slowly, "No, my child, not yet. I feel sure that you will be too closely watched as yet, to let you go without danger to yourself. Here you are unsuspected, in no place can you be safer; the apartments of the Queen and of her retinue are sacred from the King and his courtiers; those galleries are unfrequented."

She paused once more, as if a passing thought was interrupting her speech.

"Yes, you must remain here for a little while," continued the strange lady, after a minute or two.

A new idea had struck her indeed. The secret which she guarded within herself, the discovery of which would make her wretched, would ruin her; that secret had been discovered by Mary; that secret she had allowed to escape her when, in a moment of sympathy and compassion for that brave girl, she had put her apartments at her disposal. It was her interest to take care that that child should never deem it necessary to reveal what she knew, to disclose what the slyness of Lady Castlemaine might perhaps endeavour to extort from her. No, Mary would leave under her own escort. It was in vain for the latter to assure her that a friend of her father was in town just now; her unknown patroness would not yield, unless Mary was sure that that friend, who was in another man's service, could leave with her at once.

"You have as much to fear from the King as from Lady Castlemaine; you had better therefore remain here for the present, whilst Miss Kennedy watches a favourable opportunity of sending you off."

Her urgent request to Mary to remain was a sure proof indeed that the unknown lady had given up the idea which she had entertained at first, that she did not regard Mary any longer in the light of a rival in her affections; still she never pronounced the name of Mary's playmate. That name might hover on her lips whenever she thought that she might ask Mary something about him, but a kind of oppressive feeling seemed to close her mouth. She was facing the poor,

defeated, helpless child whom she had saved, and who was living upon her mercies; she was facing her like a culprit; she trembled as if she feared to put a single question to her, and she was painfully conscious of it.

Mary had respectfully listened to all the lady's arguments, although an occasional mark of impatience might escape her. She shook her little head sorrowfully, and endeavoured to find a cause for her refusal, since she did not like to give the true one. For would it not have hurt the high-born lady to hear from the lips of that humble girl that it was repulsive to the latter to accept the proffered hospitality and protection of one who loved him—loved him to his ruin—whose name she never mentioned, but whose image was so deeply impressed upon her soul; yet that was the principal reason of her wish to go; she might find by herself the way that had been indicated to her. However, my lady would not listen to such a thing; "she took too much interest in her not to keep her for the present with her faithful Alice."

"How have I deserved so much sympathy?" asked Mary, with trembling lips. "I have simply complied with the desire you expressed when you visited me."

The lady turned away in confusion, now that she was reminded of that visit, of that favour which she had asked only in her uttermost despair. Luckily the interview, which threatened to become anything but pleasant, was interrupted by an apparition as unwelcome perhaps as it was unexpected. The door was opened, and an invalid lady was seen moving slowly forward on a crutch; her eyes were devoid of all expression, whilst her lips and nose were marked with deep furrows.

"Catharine, where are you?"

"Here, Maria; but why don't you stay in your room? it is cold here, and that's not what you want. Go back, Maria!" cried she, hastily, as she took her by the arm, and made a sign to Mary to depart. The latter was following up the hint, when the new-comer proceeded—

"Who is going there? that is a stranger's step. Your Majesty is not alone?" said the Countess de Penalva, who suddenly dropped the tone of intimacy.

Mary was thunderstruck. "Your Majesty!" repeated she, in the greatest astonishment.

"Your Majesty is not alone," repeated the Countess.

"You are right, Maria, I have got an unfortunate child here with me who is persecuted, and whom I have taken under my protection."

At these words Mary found all her proud feelings roused for a moment. Surely it was not she that had begged for the protection which she experienced, and what else could she be looked upon but a mendicant after the words she had listened to?

"Does your Majesty know her name?" asked the Countess.

Catharine gave Mary's name, and suddenly quite a different expression came over the sickly, pale face of the unfortunate cripple. "Oh, pray, Catharine, take me to her!"

Mary stood before her in the greatest embarrassment; she did not know what to think of the invalid, whom she held for a moment to be insane, but of whom she very soon entertained a different opinion, when the Countess spoke to her, and pressed her hand. "May

God bless you, my child, as I respect you. I am a poor and helpless creature that can only pray for you; but the prayer of the contrite heart is a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God. Your efforts have been in vain; they could not have been otherwise, and you would have known it had you been better acquainted with this world. Still, blessed were you in your ignorance, for it made you undertake a task which was to the honour and glory of God. The world knows only about what is its own domain, and by men you will be judged according to your success; but God looks to the heart, to the amount of self-denial and energy with which we have struggled. Receive my blessing, my child!"

Mary stooped involuntarily, and was kneeling on her knees before her, when the thin emaciated fingers of the Countess touched her golden locks, and her weak voice stammered, "May God bless you, my child!"

"Oh, my lady, *you* have the power to console," whispered Mary, and her emphasizing the word *you* sounded like a sharp rebuke in the ears of Catharine of Braganza. Her Majesty the Queen of England stood like a sinner before these two women. Every word of her dying friend seemed to pierce her heart; she was almost ready to fall down before them and to entreat them, "Saints, pray for the sinful woman!"

The Countess de Penalva had watched Mary's endeavours, and, although from a distance, had formed a sound judgment about them. Led by the purity of her own heart, she had been able to appreciate the unselfish mind of the other; she had heard from Alice the triumph of sin, and also that the defeated

champion had found a refuge in Catharine's apartments. She feared for her sister's moral courage; the Queen might be afraid of protecting her, and give her up perhaps to the enraged and spiteful mistresses, and thus it was that she had ventured to leave her sick-bed, and had dragged herself to the apartment where she had found Catharine and Mary together. Now that she learned from her sister's lips that Mary had secured a shelter, she nodded to her with so significant a look of approbation, that Catharine for once knew a moment's happiness again.

The invalid, however, had relied too much on her strength; she had to be carried back to her couch, where she was not long in falling asleep from exhaustion. Once more Catharine and Mary were alone. The latter could not account for her own emotion, but she actually shivered. Was her feeling one of respect for the majesty of the Queen, one of sympathy with the woman, one of hatred towards the loving rival, or one of contempt for the wife that had forgotten her conjugal obligations? Perhaps it was a combination of all of them. What a slough of unrighteousness was the world of this Court! The only one whom she had held to be pure, she too was a leper! The Queen of England had so far come down as to be the mistress of her playmate!

There ensued a few minutes of painful silence, painful especially to the Queen, and that silence she wished to interrupt; she wanted to hear something else than the beating and throbbing of her own heart; she had to defend herself against the accusation which the silence of that child brought against her.

"Mary, you have now learned the name I bear,

and you can gauge the confidence which I placed in you when I offered you a refuge here. Speak, Mary," said she, almost in a commanding tone, gazing at her with a stern look. "Speak!"

"And Charles Digby?" whispered the other, so gently that nobody except Catharine could hear her.

The Queen's cheek turned suddenly crimson; but the dreadful name had been spoken at last, and her oppressive feeling seemed to leave her for a moment.

"Mary, he does not know who it is that loves him."

"But, on the other hand, your Majesty knows—"

"Yes; I feel your reproach. Mary, you live with your soul in heaven, you do not know the throbbings of the earthly heart."

"Oh, that your Majesty were right! Then I should never have doubted the creature of God! But no, it does not become me to condemn anybody, that only belongs to Him!"

"And He has condemned me! Mary, may the Mother of Sorrow for ever spare you the trouble which I am suffering! Mary, you are like my sister, you are an angel, pressing the earth with but one foot, so that you may perhaps better understand me. I have not dared to entrust my secret to her; from her I have kept concealed what has so long consumed my heart. God has condemned me, Mary! Will you intercede for me before His throne? Is there no excuse for the woman who stood alone in this world, without anybody's love, chained to a man who repulsed her? I was like the captive who can see the sunbeams fall upon the garden flowers outside, where her sisters are wandering and enjoying themselves

whilst she is longing after the cheerful rays and fragrant plants."

"Why should the Lord God have revealed himself to His children, why should He have endowed every human breast with the capability of understanding that which is pleasant in His sight, if it were not to suppress every aspiration of the sinful heart?" There was no Queen for Mary here, nothing but the woman had remained. "Had not the crucifixion to precede the resurrection? had not perfection to be accomplished by suffering and struggling?"

"No, you do not know either what love is in a woman's heart!" cried Catharine, in despair.

"Love? do you speak of your love?"

"Yes, I love him with all my heart."

Mary turned deadly pale. "Holy love does not seek its own, and your Majesty seeks nothing but your own!"

"Mary, I would give my life——"

"When your Majesty came to me, then yet unknown, I challenged you openly to confess your love before God and man, and then your Majesty refused, because you could not do so. It now proves true that an impassable gulf separates you from him."

"Still I love him! Does true love ask for rank and position, for title or name?"

"Holy love *does* ask for God's commandments," replied Mary, firmly.

"As an ardent one can make us forget them."

"Perhaps so," whispered the other. "I imagine the heathen knew of such a love—that is the ardent love which you harbour within your breast, whilst you have not the courage of self-sacrifice? The distance

that separates you from Charles Digby is not to be shortened, but it may be overlooked. Has the loving one courage enough for that?"

"You mean——?"

"Add courage to your passion, and think of what he is suffering. Renounce your rank, and follow him. The world is large enough; prove that you really love him by going with him."

"Mary, you are a child."

"The Lord said unto the rich young man, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.' Only the young man could not. He pretended to love the Lord, but he was incapable of sacrificing his own desires."

"Mary, as *you* speak to me, nobody ever dared speak to me before. Oh, if it were true what I sometimes suspect, that you yourself——"

Mary was silent for a moment, as if she were taking counsel with her own heart. At last she said solemnly, "I declare once more, by Almighty God, that it is not selfishness that makes me demand the sacrifice on your part. But consider what must be the end," continued she, after a while; "what can it lead to but to his ruin and to yours? A union at least might prevent his destruction: for his sake and for your own therefore choose. Never see him again, or link your fate with his by—a crime!"

Catharine crouched back; it was to her as if she were kneeling before her father-confessor, and listening to the word of God.

"Once more, where must it lead to?"

"I cannot forget him."

"Well then, bridge the gulf. Satan has power as well as the angels of light."

"We should fly, you mean? Silly child! the whole earth would rebel against me; the vilest would stone me, and the worst would curse me!"

"And that they do not do so is merely because they do not know your Majesty yet."

Catharine's dark eyes flashed for awhile with anger, and she compressed her lips convulsively; but the passion of the daughter of the South was soon subdued when Mary knelt down before her—entreated her with tears in her eyes to choose the better part, to gather strength to suppress an unholy feeling, and to break at once an engagement which sin alone could have contracted.

"Rise, Mary, you need not kneel down before me," said Catharine, sobbing loudly. "Is there no other alternative? Mother of God, have mercy upon me! Mary, I have never seen him since the evening of the ball."

"Was that your own choosing?"

"I wrote to him; I made an appointment with him, but when the hour for the interview had come I dared not go. It must have been the voice of God that kept me back."

"Or the fear of your own safety or of his life, for that, I presume, you endanger?"

"These are harsh words, Mary!"

They were harsh but true words. She dared not meet Charles any longer outside the Palace, and had therefore fixed upon the Pavilion. What might be safer for her was more dangerous to him, and of that she did not think. Charles had kept the rendezvous, but he had been disappointed.

"Is your Majesty pledged never to see him again?" asked Mary, at last.

"Once more must I see him, once more—merely to take leave of him. Holy Mother, have mercy upon me, and grant me rest and quiet in my grave! Mary, I am so utterly wretched!"

Which of these two women was most to be pitied? Silent grief is intense agony, and Mary's sorrow was silent, restrained, and concealed. The other woman was loud and passionate in the utterance of her grief, and she could not conceive how that wounded Mary's heart the more deeply. Did Catharine then really love him, love him as she thought he ought to be loved, above everything, above the world; nay, and she shuddered at the idea, even above her God?

But the love of the Queen of England had no other future than her own. It must be combated and conquered, and therefore it was that Mary continued to beg her not to see him again.

Catharine's courage, however, was not equal to such a sacrifice. Although Mary might argue that it was much more difficult to part on meeting again after a long interval, Catharine remained firm in her resolution, while she most solemnly declared that she would meet him for the last time; and in order that Mary should not insist any further, she was requested to be present at the interview in the Pavilion.

The invitation was indignantly rejected; it was the first time that her Majesty had observed so much anger in that gentle eye, so much insulted pride in that loving countenance. She took her hand in a friendly manner, and attempted to make her forget the request; she assured Mary of her royal friendship,

and repeated the promise that that evening's meeting should be the last.

"And is your Majesty quite safe from being watched?"

"This evening *he* will be banqueting with his friends. Do you think he has not to make up for every hour that you have made him lose?"

That woman condemned and looked down upon the evils that were raging elsewhere, but did not see how sin was stealing gently into her own heart. Mary made this observation tacitly, and the answer which she had just received to her apparently meaningless question, confirmed her harsh judgment of such a passion. It was not that woman's conscience that had kept her back from the first meeting, but it was indeed fear for her own safety. Why did the inward voice not caution on this occasion? She knew the reason why: "the King was banqueting with his friends."

Mary was sure now that there was to be an interview, and she had overrated her courage. She had not forsworn herself when she declared that the suspicion of the Queen was ill-founded, for she really imagined that she was possessed of sufficient strength to pray even for the rival that might still become his own. And now the mere thought of that parting scene aroused the sting of jealousy within her bosom. For a long, long time did she gaze through the windows upon the Pavilion, which led to the apartments of the Queen, through the very closet that had been assigned to her, and when the evening descended upon that fatal day, she was still standing there, and she remained there until she was roused

from her meditations by the step of somebody who was cautiously crossing the little room. She knew who that somebody was, and whither that step was directed. All was darkness and quietude around her, only in the distance a dark figure seemed to move across the white snowfield, spying, searching, sneaking with the intense anxiety of a burglar who dreads discovery. Could that shadow be Charles, Charles who never before had feared the light of day on any of his ways? All was shrouded in darkness and quiet also yonder, until a dim glimmer of light appeared, and immediately disappeared, behind the thick damask silk curtains, which did not quite cover one of the windows. This, however, was soon remedied, though nothing but the most extreme caution could have possibly noticed it.

Mary's eyes were glazed as she watched in the darkness, her heart was throbbing with irregular beat; her bosom was heaving; her sufferings were unspeakable. How long she had been standing there she knew not, for she was no longer conscious of her existence. And yet she breathed, and saw, and thought, for suddenly she started and uttered a half-suppressed cry. Several human shadows were now moving cautiously and slowly along the snow, proceeding—oh, God!—in the direction of the fatal Pavilion. At the same time she noticed a hurried footstep in the Queen's apartments. Alice rushed into her closet, her features ghostly pale, her trembling lips scarcely able to utter her message: "Where was her Majesty? The Lord High Chamberlain was waiting with an order from the King, which he had to deliver by word of mouth only."

"Show me the way to the Pavilion!" sounded the word of command from Mary Hollis's lips. The maid

obeyed, and, after having passed a suite of rooms, she pointed to the door.

"That will do, now go back," said Mary, hastily, after which she hurried on her way.

Charles Digby had seen his ideal realized; he had been permitted to see his unknown angel face to face. He was still under the spell of his fantasy, which certainly presented to his admiring gaze and homage something different from what he had expected, and yet something, to his eyes, like the image of his dreams. He did not ask himself whether those features formed lines and curves such as he had pictured to his imagination, nor whether those eyes bore an expression such as he had so often supposed in the gaze of his ideal. Would his illusions disappear when once the first fire of his passion should be quenched? would he not then be obliged to confess to himself that his ideal had *not* been realized, that the eye of the body, at all events, had seen differently from the eye of his fancy? However this might be, that time had not yet come. She was different from Lady Castlemaine, and that was for the moment sufficient. He was passionately irresistible in his arguments against the wavering, undecided resolution of his love to say farewell for ever. He was most eloquent in the protestation of his sentiments, and in the assurance of his confidence in hers, but more urgent also in his reasons for an overt engagement. "Why," said he, emphatically, "why should their feelings bear any longer the stamp of a guilty or criminal connexion?" There had been evidently great changes in that youthful and impressive mind since these two lovers had met together in Buckingham House, for that which he

now demanded would never then have escaped his lips.

Kneeling down before her, he gazed entreatingly in that eye which attempted to turn aside, whilst it seemed to be under the spell of a magic influence emanating from his. Where now was her strength? Where the firmness of her resolution, which ought to have been strengthened by his very desire to walk in the light of day? She looked at him with her most languid eyes, at the handsome youth that seemed handsomer to her than ever! She fancied herself in Eden, but the cherub with flaming sword was standing at the gate, and drove the reckless woman from the ground where she ought never to have trodden. Both Charles and the Queen trembled in all their limbs. The latch was lifted from the garden entrance, just as the door was opened from the other side. Mary rushed into the Pavilion, and had barely time to utter the word "fly," and to point in the direction whence she had come. Catharine of Braganza beckoned her to stay, and not to follow her, as she fled herself, as if she had been borne on wings. Ensign Digby and Mary Hollis were alone present when Charles Stuart entered the garden door with Lady Castlemaine and his Grace of Buckingham.

"Mary!" murmured the King, whilst Buckingham burst out in loud laughter, and looked significantly at her ladyship.

"How could your Majesty give me such a serious command to follow you, merely to be shown what I knew long ago? That is my lady's second surprise," said Buckingham, sarcastically; "I wonder whether a third is in store for us?"

"The surprise may be greater than you think, my lord," replied my lady, biting her pale lips, and scrutinizing the embarrassed couple with piercing eyes. "Sire, allow us to proceed to her Majesty's apartments. The Queen of England cannot be far off."

Without waiting for the King's reply she moved a step forward, ready to carry out her plan.

"One moment, my lady," began the King, whilst a sign of command caused her to stay. "The Queen of England shall not be approached in such a manner. Mr. Digby, you seem to possess an incorrigible propensity for gallant adventures, and for such you seem by preference to select the time and place with so much recklessness, with so much daring even, that many a head, by God! has fallen for lesser crime. Mr. Digby, on whose account did you come here?"

A moment of violent inward struggle here ensued. Whether he refused to give the name, and appealed to the laws of honour, as he had done before, or whether he spoke the truth—which he hardly knew himself—the danger remained the same for her who had left him in order to save herself. Still, if he did the first, if he were silent, then Mary, his innocent playmate, might become the victim. She stood close by his side, ghostly pale, with her arms crossed upon her bosom, but still by his side, more courageous and more faithful than the other woman. Everything was reeling before his eyes; he could not be silent, he could not speak, and the King kept staring at him with an expression in his face that would have caused him to tremble had he for a moment thought of his own danger.

But the hour of his delivery was approaching, a

delivery such as he had never anticipated, and which for a moment inspired him with hitherto unknown emotions.

"Sire, it was on my account that Mr. Digby came here," stammered Mary.

"On your account? Do not think that you will save him by that confession!" replied the King. "Is it true, Mary Hollis, that you, the pretended saint, who wished to set me an example of all that was good and holy, that you should have come hither to meet that reckless youth?"

"Lord God!" uttered she with a sigh, for not until now did she conceive the whole extent of her sacrifice, not until now did she realize that all her work was destroyed. But one look at the petrified companion of her youth, who had gathered such bitter fruit from the tree planted by himself—a look at him, who had a claim upon her assistance, and whose life might be spared through her, supplied her with superhuman strength to bear the burden of disgrace; she stammered with quivering though distinct voice: "Yes, it is true, sire!"

"Then you love him? then you are——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted she, for fear of hearing a word that would have caused the blood to rush towards her livid cheeks.

"Mary! Mary!" spoke a broken voice by her side, and the tone in which these two words were uttered seemed to her an adequate reward for her sacrifice.

"Hypocrite!" exclaimed Charles Stuart; he turned aside with contempt, and not until then disappeared the image from his mind that had ever continued to present itself in his dreams, even amidst his most ex-

travagant diversions. "I thank you, my lady, for having cured me of a serious disease, although I confess that a more agreeable method might have been selected than this one. Then she received him here?"

"That ought not to surprise your Majesty," was Buckingham's scornful remark. His Grace evidently enjoyed the humiliation of that child and the mistake of my Lady Castlemaine. "I always knew that they lived on terms of intimacy together."

"George Villiers, you lie!" cried Charles, beside himself with rage."

"Hush! hush! It is true," whispered Mary by his side. "Do not contradict him, I cannot possibly bear this any longer."

Lady Castlemaine was puzzled what to think. She was inclined to doubt the truth of Mary's assurance, and yet there was so much to verify appearances. Could she have been again mistaken, and this time even have sullied the dignity of royalty? No, that child was sacrificing herself from affection for her playmate, that child was a hostile power that thwarted her in everything, that child had uttered a falsehood, and by so doing, she had saved Catharine of Braganza. Yea, saved her! With even less appearance of truth Charles Stuart would have been inclined to believe her words, and to save the honour of the name of his consort, or rather of his Queen. How easily could he now assume the appearance of believing everything, for was not that the same girl whom he had once before surprised with Charles at the fancy ball, and of whom Buckingham had always spoken in such doubtful terms. "Why, she was not any better than the rest," said Charles Stuart, calmly to himself;

already he was sorry for having a moment regretted the disclosure in the Pavilion. Still, this time he could not and would not treat with impunity the rashness of that young man, upon whom he had looked of late with the most unfavourable eyes. He addressed Charles Digby with dignified severity: "You are no longer worthy to wear the uniform that raised you to the honour of watching over the house of your King. You may thank my particular favour for not inflicting a more heavy punishment upon the impudence of one who has dared to pursue his love intrigues even into the immediate presence of the Queen of England. Take that girl with you. Her Majesty can be no longer her protectress. Lord High Steward of England, see to it that the gates of Whitehall be closed upon both of them."

He left, followed by my lady, and soon afterwards by Buckingham, who could not resist the temptation of carrying out the duties of his high and important office by coolly leaving it to Mr. Digby's consideration, "whether he had not better go with his fair friend by the same way that he had come?"

Charles gnashed his teeth, and his hand grasped the poniard that was by his side; but a glance at Mary, who was still standing there with her eyes cast down, with her arms crossed, like a penitent Magdalene—calmed his irritation. If she could suffer in silence, she, the pure, proud, noble and courageous woman, was not he bound to do the same? He restrained himself, but he had no need of doing so very long, for Buckingham had disappeared and left them alone together.

The tears suddenly gushed from his eyes, and he

fell down at her knees. "Mary! Mary! if this place were a holier one I should cry to you——"

"Take me to Dickens. This must be the last time that we see each other." She covered her face with one hand, and beckoned him away with the other.

"No, Mary, no!"

She repeated her request, and stepped forward to the garden entrance of the Pavilion. He conceived the cause of her hurry, and did not resist any longer; he too breathed more freely in the open air than in the rooms where—he doubted no longer—he had met the Queen of England. Not a word was exchanged between the young people; neither looked up to the windows, where a glimmer of light pierced the damask curtains. Mary, absorbed as she was in her own thoughts, had noticed that he too did not cast a look behind. It was intensely cold, and she was hardly prepared for an out-door evening walk, but Charles put his cloak over her, so as to keep her trembling limbs warm at least. She had entered Whitehall in state, and had to leave it like a criminal, but never in her life had she been purer and nobler than now. She had thought it her mission to preserve a whole kingdom, she had regarded herself in the light of a prophetess of the Old Testament, and she had sacrificed everything, even herself for one man only. That she had been able to do so was because she wished to be nothing more than a woman; the genuine loving heart had triumphed over the visionary and fanatic maiden.

Gloomy days were in store for the Digbys. We have seen the head of the family crushed for a moment by the severe blow struck at his glorious pros-

pects, by the calamity that robbed him of the means of gratifying his family pride, by the incident which caused him to lose in a few moments all he had saved by years of privation and industry. The grey head was bowed down, the bright smile fled from his face, the coarse but jovial words did not flow from his lips for a very long time. Instead of seeing the family estates extended by the additional increase of his neighbour's acres, he had been obliged to mortgage the ancestral hall, the lands improved by Dickens and himself, and all this to discharge the debts of his only child. It need not be said to his honour that, once being reconciled to the idea of encumbering his estate, he had not wavered for a minute between the choice of paying "that blackguard" Buckingham a sum which could not be recovered by law, or of keeping the money to himself, and denying the validity of the debt altogether. "No Digby," said he, "shall be under obligation to such a scoundrel," and with a firm hand he had acknowledged the debt in a letter to Buckingham. Since that time he had always desired to return with "that young scamp of his," but he was longing first of all to have an interview with his Majesty, in whose forgetfulness and profligacy, however he might hear it confirmed, he could not possibly believe. The son of the blessed martyr could not be so deteriorated, and such evil rumours as Sir Henry could not possibly gainsay were all put down to the account of "the court sponges."

Charles had assured him that he could not obtain an audience so soon, and that he had better remain for some time; he had also hinted that he could not so suddenly resign a commission which every nobleman looked upon as so high an honour, and endeavoured

always to delay their joint departure as long as his father insisted upon coming along with them.

Dickens had always shaken his head in a significant manner on hearing Charles's arguments; that the young squire grew visibly weaker and thinner every day had also often led the thoughtful Hollander to serious meditations; nay, the same thing had even been noticed by the chaplain, who flattered himself with having discovered something quite new. That the son was suffering from the difficulties of the father was evident, but then he ought to have common sense enough, such was the Dutchman's philosophy, to see that grieving and grumbling are of no avail, and that a strong hand at the plough is a much better security for a good harvest than a hundred mendicant prayers for heavenly blessing. He was almost sure that there was something else preying upon Charles's mind, and his suspicions were soon to be confirmed; everything would become clear to him, for he was soon to be called in council to set all matters, if possible, right. Sir Henry had declared that no Digby should be under any obligation to a Buckingham, and he had shown by this that the pride of his ruined family was still unabated. Alas! the hour was fast approaching when that pride was doomed to receive a dreadful blow.

The master and his two attendants—the chaplain and the Hollander—were seated near the cheerful, comfortable fire, and Charles had left early that evening, as he said, on urgent professional duties. Sir Henry, undisturbed in his meditations by anything or anybody, was just thinking of his return, and of his meeting Lucy Morton, when he was suddenly roused from his musings by a familiar footstep on the

stairs. Master and servants were equally surprised at the unexpected appearance of the young people, who we know had left Whitehall together an hour before. Charles introduced Mary to his father; he brought the pale, half-conscious maiden into the old man's presence, and did not seem to notice the joyful ejaculations uttered by Dickens and King, each after his own fashion. Sir Henry looked at both as if they were ghosts; he moved his chair back as the young couple approached, and cried with a rudeness, which in reality was meant to conceal his fright, "Charles, Mary! have you fallen down from the moon?"

"Father," said Charles, taking Mary's icy hand into his own, "the maiden whose hand I hold in mine—I love her."

"Dickens, protect me," cried Mary, throwing herself into the arms of the old resolute Dutchman, and hiding her face against his breast.

"Are you both mad? Where do you come from?" asked Sir Henry. "Confound it, Mary! you might at least have said, 'Sir Henry, how do you do?'"

"Spare her, father, and listen to me for a few moments only. Mary has been my playmate; I loved her like a sister at a time when I did not know what it was to love, at a time when I was dreaming through life. You afforded me an opportunity of seeing the world. Oh, father, that I had made a better use of your favour, that I had profited by it in a manner which to you, dear father, would have been less painful!"

"Hush, my lad, is not all paid? Do not speak thus. I ought, upon my soul, to begin to cry after such a solemn beginning." The good old soul was

not aware that the tears were trickling down his cheeks already.

"I thought I loved another, father, but now that all is over, I see how much I was in error; I see that I have gone too far astray to seek for what was growing and blooming all the while by my side. Father, the women who I thought loved me left me in the hour of danger; and she, whom I held to be indifferent to me, has even braved the censure of the world to save me from utter ruin. Father, Mary has sacrificed herself for me."

"That's good of her. Come here, my child, unless you have become too great a lady."

Mary however did not go nearer, and was still hiding herself behind the Hollander. She wished herself far away from this scene—a hundred miles away—or at least to be unseen by him in whose protestations of love she heard merely the voice of gratitude. Charles perceived that his father was labouring altogether under a misapprehension, owing perhaps to his own incoherent communications. He overcame all his reluctance, he conquered all his pride, and began to confess all his trespasses like a penitent sinner. Although covering all his peccadilloes with a veil of gauze, he gave his parent sufficiently to understand that he had been allured by Lady Castlemaine and by another lady; that their personal charms, which he imagined had inspired him with affection, had been attended by the coldest selfishness, and that his ever ungratified feelings had never ceased to look back to the past for something else—for something better.

He had pronounced the name of Lady Castlemaine, but a kind of reluctant feeling withheld him from

naming the fair lady whom he had never himself sufficiently identified; it was therefore only by a slight allusion that he could refer to the disturbed interview of that evening, although he did not omit to praise Mary's courage to the skies. Of course, Sir Henry failed to see how matters exactly stood between them; one thing was evident, that the girl and his boy had been found together, and that the good name of the former had suffered through it, but then that was not so serious an affair, seeing that she had not much to lose. However, he would not show himself ungrateful towards the girl that had saved his only son, and after a few moments' reflection he said, "Mary, we shall never speak of what has happened. Mary, our chaplain offers you his hand and his name. Are you now satisfied, my child? Cry no longer. You shall marry a clergyman, and a good fellow into the bargain!"

"Father, do not insult the woman whom I have chosen to be my bride. Mary, here I may confess that I love you, really love you. Do not reject me! Pardon my manifold transgressions. You are too pure to see the spots that stain me. And you will pardon me. Surely you did not feign when you confessed your love before the King! Mary, look at me, look at your playmate, who by this time has learned to know himself."

"Stop this comedy!" cried Sir Henry, angrily. "You are either drunk or mad. That girl to be Mrs. or Lady Digby!"

"Pray, why not, sir? Such a step-daughter would bring happiness and honour to the family. And both are wanted just now, do you see?"

"Dickens, you hold your jaw! Don't you imagine

that your five-and-twenty years' hanging about the place has given you a right to say anything. I won't hear a word more about it. She may have the chaplain if she likes, and I will give her a dowry."

"Father, as there is a God in heaven, Mary shall be mine and no one else's!"

The chaplain, the drudge of the family, had moved backwards and forwards on his chair; he had made an occasional attempt at speaking, and the words had stuck in his throat, but he could be silent no longer. He had not failed to notice the gratuitous insult offered to himself, but that had hardly touched him; his life had been one of suffering and endurance, but he felt for that poor child who bowed her head more deeply at every new insult, and seemed to ask shelter and support from Dickens, who looked sternly before him. But the irrepressible Dutchman seemed defeated this time. Dickens appeared to have lost all energy, and Mr. King, the oppressed human soul, the scorn and ridicule of the world, raised his voice in his stead. He did not upbraid Sir Henry for having deemed him worthy to cloak the disgrace of others—that was too common a thing in those days for men of his position—nor did he complain of being thus disposed of like a beast of burden, for, on the one hand, he did not believe in Mary's disgrace, and, on the other, he was accustomed to obey the riding-whip of his master. But he rebuked Sir Henry severely for his sinful pride, which nothing could justify.

"Not the man with the highest title, sir, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that is the best; there would be nothing strange in it, if many a

ploughman should be preferred in the day of judgment to many a nobleman."

"King, where the deuce do you get all those big words from? Silence! I tell you, we are not at chapel, man!"

"If I had my choice, sir, I would rather be Mary Hollis than Sir Henry Digby," continued the chaplain, who pushed his desperate courage even so far as to make a sign to his master not to interrupt him. "It is not money or property that ennobles, sir, but it is the soul; and therefore it is that I look upon Mary's nobility as a higher one than yours, sir!"

"Will you hold your noise, you confounded parson?" cried Sir Henry, jumping up and making a movement as if he were going to seize the chaplain by his throat. That he did not carry out his threat was perhaps because Mr. King, instead of going backward, remained motionless where he stood, looking with a scornful and reproachful eye at his master. For the first time in his life Sir Henry dared not chastise that grotesque caricature of humanity. Charles, however, was annoyed at the interference of the dependants of his family; he gently pushed the chaplain backward, in order to take his place. "Father, for the sake of that name that we both bear in common, do not resist any longer. My resolution is immovable. Charles Digby will never marry any one but Mary Hollis."

"You have no will of your own, you young scamp, whom God gave me in His anger. First you have made me poor, and now you wish to dishonour me."

At these words Mary awoke from her stupor. It

required a violent shock such as this to restore her to consciousness. "Not I, Sir Henry, will be the means of disgracing your family. Has a single word of mine given you reason to think that I desire what your son is contemplating? Your heir disposes of me as if I were his property. Before speaking of the disgrace intended to be brought upon your family in my person, you would have shown your wisdom, sir, by consulting her who is supposed to be the cause of your ruin."

"Pardon me, Mary, but I was assured of your feelings. You have a right to pass judgment upon me. Mary, do you love me? Will you be mine?"

He had meanwhile seized both her hands and looked into her eyes. Sternness and pride disappeared from her countenance.

"Charles, Charles!" whispered she.

"You love me, you do love me! I know it! I know it!" he cried. "Father, in the sight of God and man, I choose Mary for my bride. Where she is, there shall be my dwelling; where she goes——"

"Not that, Charles! The son should not resist his father's authority," cried Mary. "Oh, that I had one whom I might obey! Sir Henry, I do love your only son. God has permitted that my love should become so deeply rooted in my heart that no outward power, no inward strength, would be able to extirpate it. But, Sir Henry, I bow to your authority; I shall never bear your name unless it be with your own free consent."

"But that will never be," sighed Charles, who knew how immovable was a resolution announced with so much firmness and calmness.

Sir Henry was utterly perplexed; he did not indeed conceive how much strength of mind was involved in so heroic a determination, but still he valued the resignation of the pretty, pale child, who looked a lady born in every respect.

"Charles, we must not see each other again until your father speaks the word. Farewell, my friend, farewell."

"That word shall be spoken, or else your parting farewell shall also be my parting word to father and mother!"

"No threats, Charles! no persuasion even. The consent of Sir Henry and Lady Digby must be a voluntary one." She was desirous of putting an end to the scene, and begged Dickens to take her away.

"Oh! if Lucy were but here," murmured Sir Henry, who actually began to feel for the low-born maiden. He had entirely softened down; he had borne the defiance of his paternal authority; he had listened to the threats of his son without lifting a chastising hand. "Mary, my child!" cried he, suddenly, as she stood with Dickens on the threshold, "come to me; you are a good girl; shake hands with me. Good night, Mary."

Dickens bent his head over her shoulder in the direction of his master, and whispered, with a voice full of emotion, "The good father is sure to conquer the proud Sir Henry in the end. God's blessing upon this night, sir!"

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Elsewhere, in a wing of the royal palace, where the thick curtains had been lowered as if to shut the scene

inside from the outer world altogether, there was one woman kneeling before another, and bent over a crucifix, which she bathed with her bitterest tears. There sounded in a silvery whisper the confession of a sinful heart, bleeding with many a wound, and that confession was conveyed by the sympathizing sister lip to the throne of Him who had come among men to save and to liberate them, who had been tempted, but had resisted the temptation, who had suffered but to His ultimate glorification. And it was as if a gentle secret voice were whispering the answer from heaven : "Thy sins are forgiven thee ; go, and sin no more."

CHAPTER XI.

EQUITY AND ROYALTY.

THE thunderclouds were gathering in the political sky, and grew more ominous every minute. Charles Stuart was like the child that had evoked the infernal demon, but forgotten the charm wherewith to lay him again. The new Parliament had met, and had begun, like so many of its predecessors, to complain in the most respectful and submissive terms of extravagance and profligacy. The demands for grants made by the crown had been received with bold commentaries upon the general state of affairs. Changes had been asked for, and at last insisted upon. More than one hint had been thrown out in the House of Commons that there was one person of high position to whom more especially was owing the extravagance of the Court. Lord Shaftesbury was a faithful informer to his Majesty, and without naming anybody his lordship gave his royal master sufficiently to understand who was the person alluded to.

It was only a few days later that the great news reached the apartments of Whitehall. The House of Commons had repaired to the House of Lords, and when ushered in, had lodged a formal complaint against

George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, as an unfaithful minister of the crown, and a transgressor of the laws of the three estates, more especially of the Habeas Corpus Act, and these changes were supported by the most reliable evidence. The past had shown the meaning of such a complaint. In the hour of the greatest self-confidence, of the fullest belief in the support of the sovereign, many a favourite had trembled on hearing such an accusation, and packed up all his valuables with an eye towards the Continent. We may therefore imagine the state that Buckingham was in when the Commons knocked at the door of the Lords. In the greatest dismay his Grace had hurried to Whitehall, to see whether Charles Stuart was able and willing to support him, to test whether he could still induce his friend to take a step which he refused to take, or dared not take, the day before. He had not a trace left of his usual cold, overbearing sarcasm, of his wonted reckless, careless disposition. The courtiers bowed before him without speaking a single word, and those who could avoided him. It was as if the very atmosphere which he breathed proclaimed his disgrace. Suddenly he heard a gentle voice whisper his name, and on turning round he perceived Lady Castlemaine, who approached him with an amiable smile on her lips, and asked him, after the usual complimentary salutations, "Has it reached your Grace's ears how the Commons have dared to libel you? They are bold enough to suspect your Grace of having abducted a free-born woman. I hear even that a man named Jack, who was apprehended on the Hallam moors, was examined in Parliament until a late hour last night. Does your Grace know anything about that man Jack?"

"Leave me alone," muttered Buckingham, whose face had assumed a livid hue, and who, under existing circumstances, felt entirely unequal to the task of answering her ladyship's cutting remarks.

"How morose you are, George! Still angry with me? Just as if you had come too near a beehive, and the pretty insects had treated you to a demonstration of their sting."

"What beehive? You mean a wasp's nest. But it shall be burnt out."

"Have you booked for the Continent by one of the Dutch vessels, my dear George?" asked she, confidentially. "If not, you must keep your eye on the Tower walls. My poor friend, how you are to be pitied; one woman repulsed you when you were down on your knees, the other will make you pay dearly for the proud illusion of passionate whim. Farewell, hapless friend, I will remember thee in my evening prayer."

He paused for a while, as if to breathe more freely after she had gone, and clenched his fists, whilst his face assumed a threatening look. The dying panther is still dangerous as long as he can move his claws. Woe to him that should be too rash in his victory and approach his prey too soon!

When Buckingham entered the royal study he found the King, to his great delight, closeted with the Duke of York. The latter, in his usual black dress, was slowly walking up and down the room, and as he spoke he cast an occasional glance at his elder brother, who was lying carelessly on a couch, yawning and stretching out his arms. He rose as Buckingham came in. "Will, it is all about you, my boy!

Have you heard what their game is? The monkeys have become tigers!"

"And those tigers will chase the royal lion from the forest," observed the Duke of York.

"What do you think, Will? Do matters really stand so bad as that?"

"So bad, sire, that I do not believe I shall sleep in my own bed this evening, unless your Majesty interfere."

"But I cannot, Will! Why, odds fish, did you kidnap the wench? I go mad when I think of it. To leave me with the idea that she was a stainless lily!"

"Charles, your throne is tottering beneath you. Stop those trifling considerations, and look to your interest," said the Duke of York.

"How happy would you be if I were to ask you to do that for me? Bother your old wives' fear! You disgust me, with your fright and your gloomy forebodings. Matters are not half so bad as you imagine. Not a word has led me to suspect that they have got the scent of that confounded treaty, which is your doing, both of you. Well does it suit you to trouble me with your complaints. By all the saints! all my anxiety is owing to you two!"

It was impossible to make a cleaner breast of more barefaced selfishness; it was impossible for Buckingham to receive any more convincing proof of what support he had to expect from a master who was not threatened in his own person, as he thought, and who intended to keep out of the struggle for fear of his own safety. Buckingham realized the danger to which he was exposed.

"Be King for once in your life," said the Duke of York. "Give the word of command, and a hundred swords shall be drawn."

"You speak like every heir-apparent!" replied the King, with nonchalance. "Much obliged, James. I appreciate your kind intentions, but I wish to reign a little longer."

"To bear the royal name, you mean, which is quite a different thing," replied James, with a sneer.

"Sire, dissolve your Parliament," added Buckingham.

"There is nothing I should like better, Will; but then I must first have my grants. Surely, our nephew has some claim on certain moneys, and so have all our creditors."

"But every hour the danger of your Majesty must increase. They do not aim at George Villiers, but at the Crown."

The King shook his head, as if to say that he did not believe it, and Buckingham continued, "Your Majesty is mistaken. George Villiers, I repeat it, is too insignificant a personage to be thus attacked. What Parliament wants is to see him on his trial, and then, when George Villiers stands before his judges, *he* will not be troubled about the abduction of a Yorkshire lass who liked it well enough. But my Lord Shaftesbury and his party friends will sound him about the treaty of Dover, and the poor prisoner at the bar will have to confess everything, and to betray his most gracious Sovereign!"

"That you would never do, Will."

"I should be compelled, sire. If we hurt our arm we feel it in the head; if the servant is apprehended, the servant who had no other aim in view but to please and

to help his master, then the latter must unbind his fetters, unless he be prepared to share them. Once more, sire, dissolve your Parliament!"

"But what on earth," cried Charles, as he stamped his foot with rage, "what brought you to the reckless deed with which you are charged?" He would not bring himself to believe that his Will was right in his supposition that both were in danger, or at least he would not show that he believed it, or that he actually dreaded that his best friend should become the accuser of royalty, unless royalty took care of its friend.

"My recklessness was not so very great, sire," replied Buckingham to his Majesty's question. "Many worse things have passed off quietly, but then there was no ambitious, treacherous woman at the bottom as there is now—I mean Barbara Palmer, sire! It is she that sets the curs at me, and, with all that, she is too infatuated to see that your Majesty is standing behind me, in equal danger of the raging animals."

"Barbara, you say?"

"Yes, sire! The same woman who also induced the King of England to lie in ambuscade for the sake of seizing a valuable prey, and sent him home with a dormouse—the woman who sees in everybody an obstacle to her ambitious designs, which she must and shall remove—first Buckingham, then Louise, then the Queen, and finally the King, for she has children to aspire to the throne."

York, who had scarcely listened at first, became more attentive now, and looked in amazement from Buckingham to the King.

"Do be easy on that score, James!" cried his Majesty. "I shall die childless. But do you really

think, Will, that this storm can have been actually raised by Sarah, who is under such great obligations to me? Surely it can never be that Yorkshire child?"

"Oh no; it is my Lady Castlemaine, and nobody else. Some time ago it was her design to have me slain by the knife of a common murderer, and now she wishes to render a service to your Majesty, for, I repeat it, sire, in my person they want to touch you."

"Charles," said the Duke of York, "take a resolution that will surprise the world. The Life-guards are alone sufficient to disperse the parliamentary rabble. Then you bring a few heads to the block—Shaftesbury's first of all, and that will inspire them with terror. If they will not obey from respect, you must govern them by fear."

"But, by all the saints, James! you are really as shortsighted as a night-owl. What about the grants? Do you wish me to levy taxes in my own name, and become a martyr, like our father? Much obliged to you, brother."

"There is another alternative," interrupted Buckingham. "Louis XIV. remains your ally, and will not reckon your wavering attitude in the account. One word, sire, and her Grace of Portsmouth with the French Ambassador is lying at your feet."

"Have you arranged with them all about it?" asked the King, sarcastically.

"I have not spoken a word with either."

"Very well; we will think the matter over."

"I hope your Majesty will not be long in thinking," said James, who could curb his impatience no longer. "If you do not dissolve your Parliament, I for one go

to Dover: I like to have the sea before me." So saying he left.

"Thank God! Will, my brave successor has gone. How he would like to see me rush into some foolish act! And now you had better dispense with your ceremonious speeches, and tell me in plain language what the charming Sarah's designs are upon you, since she has been deceived in her dearest expectations—she wished to be queen, Will!"

Buckingham was too quicksighted not to find in that exclamation something more than the King's usual raillery. Old Rowley's vanity had been wounded; the ridiculous scene in the Pavilion had neither been forgotten nor forgiven, as far as the dupe was concerned. Buckingham used all his wit, all his sarcasm to make Barbara Palmer into a caricature, and thus to lead Charles Stuart to the point which his own interest required him to arrive at, and his energy was rewarded. For energy it required, with the fear of his life before him, to ridicule the most insignificant things, important as they were to his Majesty; to jest with my lady's *embonpoint*, whilst the voice of Mr. Speaker dinned into his ear the charge read before the Lords, and the cheers of an expectant rabble outside the House seemed already by anticipation to strike his ear. He found his perseverance rewarded, for Charles Stuart went and took counsel with the other Cabal Ministers, Shaftesbury excepted, and received from all the same advice that Buckingham had given him, had been obliged to give him; in consequence of which his Majesty wended his way to the apartments of Louise de Quérouaille. A long interview ensued, and soon after his Majesty rode with

a brilliant retinue to the House of Lords, whither the Commons had been summoned before, and from the royal throne Charles the Second spoke the word of dissolution to the daring representatives of the people.

The King's breach with his Parliament excited general surprise, and a good deal of irritation among all classes of the people; it was only in the immediate court circles that a cry of joy was raised at his Majesty's bold resolution. The rumour of the day was not long in reaching the closet of the Prince of Orange, as he was about to go out; the leathern glove which he held in his hand was thrown away in anger, and his Highness's countenance marked as much wrath and indignation now that he was alone as it indicated calm indifference when he appeared in public. He at once suspected the consequences of what had happened, and he regretted these the more as he would be prevented from watching any longer a state of affairs in which he was so deeply interested himself. But M. de Witt had once more hinted, and very plainly this time, that his presence was desired at home. The Prince had learned to his great dismay the disappearance of Mary Hollis and the return of the two royal mistresses, but he had hoped that Shaftesbury and his party would not fail to profit by the work started by that child, and to continue and extend it. After having paced up and down his apartment with a hurried step, after having weighed and balanced every possible chance, he drove to Whitehall, where he found his uncle as merry and cheerful, as careless and bantering, as he had ever met him before. It was as if the King had rid himself of a heavy burden, of all serious thoughts.

The nephew was cordially received, more cordially than ever. The uncle condescended even to explain his recent conduct, and wound up with the assurance that he would never lose sight of his nephew's interests. This assurance, however solemnly made, was a very vague one, and did not mislead the young Prince for a single moment.

"I have come to inform you, uncle, that it is my intention to leave you in a few days. I am confident that I may assure the States of your lasting friendship."

"Of course, nephew. But why should you go? Why not remain here, where your future lies?"

"I believe that I can serve your Majesty better at the Hague than in London."

Charles looked round not a little embarrassed. That young man saw clearly through him. He knew of too many secrets, and his Majesty was anxious to keep him under his own eyes, so as to be able to make use of him; but that was just what the pale youngster did not wish; his aim was to move among his uncle's enemies, and, by so doing, to compel the King to serve his personal interests. William of Orange was defeated; for the present his plans had miscarried, but who knew but what he was stronger after his defeat? That he did not intend to give the struggle up, that he contemplated taking advantage of the position which he had made for himself with so much skill and perseverance, became quite clear from the very few words which were exchanged between them on this occasion. One protestation of attachment after another flowed from Charles's lips, and they sounded almost like so many confessions; but his Highness did not utter a word of blame or reproach. And yet he seemed to

speak with a frankness which caused his uncle more and more confusion. On the last occasion his Majesty had declared that he was merely trifling with Louis XIV., and now the young Prince boldly hinted, as if the royal words had never been spoken, that he did not in the least expect anything like a closer alliance with the Republic. "Why not?" the King ventured to ask. Once more William of Orange gave proof of his wonderful memory by asking his uncle whether he meant soon overtly to declare himself a Roman Catholic, and again his Majesty contended that he did not mind being the hook and the bait as long as Louis XIV. wished to be the fish.

The interview must have been painful and fatiguing to his Majesty, for as soon as the nephew had gone, he muttered to himself, "That's another job over; still for all that, the youngster shan't walk over to the other side. How could they be so utterly stupid as to tell him what he ought never to have known?"

He hastened to go and see Louise. Once more the tide of circumstances drove him thither; as to her, she had apparently not made any endeavours to attract him ever since she had returned to Whitehall to her own apartments. He had been once to see her before he had made up his mind to dissolve Parliament, but that was the only visit she had received from him since her restoration to power. She had been amiable, cheerful, as merry and sprightly as a child, but, as usual, she had abstained from all politics. Still she had not concealed from him that a dissolution of Parliament was, in her opinion, necessary and imminent. His Majesty's intention was first to receive the grants and then to dissolve, but Louise maintained that supplies

had never ceased to flow, although that might become the case, since the Cabinet of Versailles began to murmur something of faithlessness. His Majesty fell into the trap; he had burned his vessels before he was sure of his triumph; Parliament was dissolved, and the French grants had not yet arrived.

Still he had to make sure of them, and therefore his Majesty went to see the French woman, took a seat by her side on the couch, and bent over her to admire her embroidery. What with Jack at the window and two parrots in splendid cages inside, there was a chattering and a screaming which would have annoyed anybody but herself.

"Keep them quiet, Louise," said Charles, as he stopped both his ears.

"If they were members of your Parliament I would."

"But they are not, and that's why you should; you will better succeed with these animals than I with mine. Imagine that they have dared even to aim at Buckingham, whom they prosecute for abduction. Already Dick Wharton has been given up by Buckingham, but the scoundrel on seeing that tries all he can to let his master in for it. Dick must swing; I cannot help that, and the good people must have something to amuse them."

"And Buckingham will have to go to the Continent for a few months."

"I cannot do without him."

"Orestes, thou must part from thy Pylades!" declaimed she, with comical pathos.

"Confound the people! Cannot you give me a recipe, Louise, for a soporific? As long as it tastes a little like beer they are sure to drink it, and if they won't I will put

a premium of half a pound of beef on every pint they empty. To lose Will for a couple of months!"

"That is at present the best soporific for the people. Let him be at Versailles for a few months only. That will amuse Louis and satisfy your English beef-eaters."

"If it were his own wish——"

"You must prove to him that it should be his wish."

"And he to think, Louise, that you are his friend!"

"It is just because his life is dear to me that I want him to leave London."

"Speaking of leaving London, do you know who also intends leaving us? My nephew; you are *his* friend too, and very much to my regret."

"Are you jealous?"

"Of him? certainly not. You have taste enough, but sometimes too much frankness. Louise, if ever I have been angry with you, it was after your last interview with him. The lad knows everything."

"I congratulate you. Surely you do not imagine that I have told him anything he did not know long ago. Do not trouble yourself about that: he will serve our plans in yonder land of frogs. He will work for us over there."

"I am of a different opinion."

"But I know it. Not until you command me to do so, shall I acknowledge that you have never been mistaken, or that you are altogether infallible."

She too, then, had been deceived by William of Orange, for Charles Stuart had perspicacity enough to know that in this case he saw more clearly than the charming *Française*, who tried to persuade him of the contrary with all the *aplomb* of a firm conviction.

"He is not going to Versailles, Louise."

"Very well, he may be more useful to us at the Hague."

"He is cunning."

"So much the better."

"He is very deep."

"That's capital! *mais, mon Dieu,* why should we gather thistles as long as there are flowers strewn on our path? How is her Majesty? Has she quite recovered her fright from your latest outburst of jealousy?"

Charles changed colour, but Louise burst out into loud laughter. "Is not Barbara Palmer jealous of your honour? Is not she anxious for your name as if she bore it herself? Did you think I did not know better who wore my costume at the Duke of Buckingham's ball? It was a passing whim of her Majesty, which I easily forgave. I was also anxious about your dynasty, but not with the ulterior view of belonging to it myself. I heard all about it from Buckingham. My dear Charles, how like a poor sinner you must have looked! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Let that be, Louise!" said the King, gloomily. "It seems to me that you are gathering thistles just now."

"Well, then, let us turn our attention to the flowers—the subsidies. The Ambassador has new instructions, as I am just informed. Three millions of livres will be placed at your disposal, provided my good friend is not afraid of making a slight sacrifice."

"Another Hatfield Manor, Louise?"

"Not at all, my friend. I do not ask you for anything for myself; I never did, for Hatfield Manor is still yours; I asked you for it because I was anxious to

obtain the right of receiving you there as my special guest."

"But what then is the sacrifice?"

"Louis is anxious to make the acquaintance of Lady Castlemaine."

"Do you mean that?"

"He is indeed. His Majesty looks upon it as a slight sacrifice on your part, whatever I may know to the contrary."

"It is not Louis, but you who demand her removal?"

"Removal is not exactly the word, not by any means. His Majesty looks upon her ladyship as an enemy of France, and as those hostile feelings can merely be based on prejudice, his Majesty is most anxious to have her cured of her disease across the Channel. Three millions, Charles! and then to know that my lady is provided for, for life; I should think that must be a glorious satisfaction to you." She bent over him, brought her rosy lips close to his ear, and whispered, "Don't you feign, my friend; you would much rather receive the three millions than keep fat Barbara."

The scale did by no means turn in favour of her ladyship. Already Buckingham had taken advantage of the blunders into which she had been led by her own passion. And now came Louise's tempting offer of three millions of livres with a dissolved Parliament at her back.

"I mean well enough towards Barbara," continued she; "in fact, I divine her thoughts. As to being Queen of England, that she cannot; but still you owe her some compensation. She felt very much offended when I was made a duchess. Pray, Charles, give her

the same title. I will bear all the trouble of her promotion, and you may enjoy all her gratification. You must acquaint her with your intention before the whole Court. That will tickle her vanity, my friend."

"And when will the French Ambassador come and see me?"

"As soon as your Barbara and your Will are under weigh."

The King trembled. Not only Barbara, but Buckingham too had to be sacrificed. Buckingham had to go, and that at the request of one whom Will had served of late with so much fidelity and zeal. At last the faithless and capricious courtier was paid in his own coin, and Charles Stuart was completely in the power of that charming woman who always seemed to be so merry, so full of levity, regardless of all politics. The bond which tied him to Louise was an iron, rather than a silken one. Barbara Palmer was an ambitious woman, but as she was governed by her passions, she could also be curbed and tamed by them. Louise de Quérouaille was perhaps equally aspiring, but as cold as the metal by virtue of which she reigned, so cold and calm in her calculations that no mistake was ever made in the figures which she had once put down.

The lord chamberlain opened the folding-doors of the magnificent reception-room of Whitehall. The numerous retinue almost filled the entire space. All the courtiers were assembled, for the rumour had been spread about that something extraordinary was to take place. What that "something extraordinary" was, nobody could tell. All the cabinet ministers were in attendance, with the exception of Shaftesbury, who

was expecting every moment to be ordered to the Tower, whither he certainly would have been transferred had the King been more assured of his victory, and less afraid of the popular feeling, which he was still obliged to humour and respect. This was above all evident from his attitude towards Buckingham. He had saved him from the hands of Parliament; he was about to forbid the judicial authorities to interfere any further in Dick Wharton's affair, but still he humoured the popular feeling so far that his favourite was to be temporarily sent to the Continent. How far this step was owing to Louise de Quérouaille was and remained a secret to every one except the King

Nor was even Buckingham aware of it. In the best of humours, playing with his scented gloves, or with the lace frills of his sleeves, covered with gold and jewellery, he moved about in the crowd of courtiers without any unnecessary display of his restoration to royal favour, but with charming ease and perfect taste. "His royal friend had saved him from malicious prosecution, and he left his gracious Sovereign alone to deal with the political clique of which he had been the victim." The young Duke of Monmouth, carrying his light *barrette* with blue plume in one hand, had made his appearance in a somewhat novel garb, entirely differing from the fashion of the day, but well calculated to set off his handsome figure to advantage. He was surrounded by Sidney, Ormond, Sunderland, Northumberland, and the representatives of the noblest houses of England. On the other side of the room was ranged the row of noble ladies; there was a glittering of jewellery, and a rustling of silk, and a bowing and curtseying of the most graceful figures as the noble

lords approached the beauties of the Court from the opposite direction.

Entirely in the background might be seen the gentlemen of lower rank, those that were in disgrace, and others who were not daily frequenters of the Court circle. The latter alone may account for Sir Henry being found here, for the other two considerations were certainly not applicable to him, not in his own eyes at all events. With more pride than respect he looked upon the crowd; he merely wished to see and to converse with his good Sovereign, and he would rather have met him alone. He had respectfully asked for a private audience, but he had been always refused, a denial which he ascribed to "the hangers on of the crown," who kept his Majesty back from the noblest and worthiest of his subjects. Here the Lord Chamberlain moved the white rod, and the rustling around him increased. The several groups divided themselves for a minute. The little door was opened next to the throne entrance, and the Lady of the Bedchamber and the Mistress of the Robes entered, with all the dignity of their high offices. Sir Henry recognised the one as the "queer woman" that had come to see him at the inn, and was almost dazzled by the numerous diamonds that glittered on her dress. The other lady was very modestly attired, almost plainly by the side of so much splendour. One rose in her *ceinture*, and a string of pearls in her dark locks, those were the only ornaments she wore. Still all the courtiers, as if instinctively, bowed much more deeply to her Grace of Portsmouth than to her rival, who seemed to be, however, in high spirits, and in the full consciousness of her power.

Sir Henry raised himself almost on his toes in order

the better to see. He observed that Buckingham, after having made a low bow to Lady Castlemaine, was just approaching the other lady.

"He looks still very pale," said Sir Henry to his neighbour; "he must have got it nicely."

The neighbour looked at the country squire from top to toe, and answered, "Yes, and the other has got it nicely too, the clumsy Yorkshire boor!"

"What do you say, sir? my son——"

Sir Henry would have willingly paid his insolent neighbour in his own coin, but for the excitement which now arose among the crowd, when the Lord Chamberlain announced "His Highness the Prince of Orange." His Highness was most carefully dressed on this occasion; his retinue was more numerous than it had ever been yet during his stay in England, and neither circumstance could be owing to mere accident. His Highness was about to depart, and meant to leave another impression besides the one which he had already made upon the diplomatic body; he wished to convince the English courtiers of his power and of his wealth. He had made his entrance as a bashful youth, he wished to take leave as a Prince of the blood royal. Or was it that he was resolved to show the King that he was not half so poor and destitute as he had often allowed his Majesty to suspect,—that he was by no means unhappy yet, although his favourite schemes had one and all miscarried? The Duchess of Portsmouth was immediately by his side; she took his arm rather familiarly, and led him a few steps away from the general crowd.

"Your Highness is not going to Versailles, I hear?"

"By the Hague perhaps, my lady!"

"Your Highness, in speaking to the King, has accused me."

"Of frankness? but then I was frank as well."

"Have you anything to tell me before you leave?"

"Do not cease to remember me in many respects, my lady."

"I will not fail, provided your Highness promise the same to me."

"I will do more than that."

"I am sorry that your Highness is leaving us so soon."

"I have attained my object."

"Indeed. All you wanted?"

"I have learned to know my uncle and his immediate surroundings. If I go to Versailles I am sure your Grace will keep your word."

The Duchess made a sign of consent, and felt perfectly easy in her mind. The young man had not changed at all; he did not care to make himself agreeable to the English courtiers, but he clung to her—from selfish motives, that she knew, but that did not surprise her; for what other promptings could there be except in an overexcited brain?

"Had we not better sit down, my lady?" asked she, addressing Lady Castlemaine, and offering her precedence by pointing to a seat nearest to the throne. Her ladyship found the Duchess charming.

Here the folding doors were thrown open at last, and the Lord Chamberlain announced in a loud voice, "His Majesty the King and her Majesty the Queen!" All the groups divided themselves into two rows, along which their Majesties were to pass.

Only the Prince of Orange, as a Prince of the blood, had a higher seat, next to the throne, and a little lower, behind him, stood the Dutch gentlemen. Etiquette, however, required that his Highness should rise from his seat as their Majesties approached the throne.

The King never looked in better spirits, but the Queen, leaning on his arm, moved about like a somnambulist, only half conscious of what was going on around her. She was soon conducted by the King towards the royal seat, whence she looked upon the crowd with glazed eyes.

"A burnt-out volcano never makes a beautiful mountain," whispered Louise into Barbara's ear, and her *bon-mot*—if it might be so called—was rewarded with almost audible laughter. Whether her Majesty had overheard it, or whether it was by mere accident, her Majesty turned aside, and gave Lady Castlemaine a look so strange, that the laugh died in her throat. The spark of youth seemed to return to that dim, inanimate eye, which caused my lady to turn her head, and to lose her good humour for a little while.

His Majesty had been conversing for some time with the Prince and his suite, and occasionally with Buckingham. It seemed to be his intention to give the Republic and her representatives a convincing proof of his sincere attachment, and at the same time openly to acknowledge Buckingham as his friend.

"I have to thank your Majesty for the kind reception and treatment which I have received at your hands." Thus began the Prince of Orange in his usual calm tone. "My visit to this Court has at-

tached me to your Majesty in so many respects that I shall never be able to forget it."

The compliment seemed scarcely satisfactory to his Majesty, for he thought it advisable to reply, "I do not doubt that you will afford me an opportunity of supporting all your claims and wishes."

"I know those of your Majesty, and I intend to act accordingly."

The threat was an adroit one, but only intelligible to the King, who was actually sorry that his serene nephew should go away with so much lumber, as he called the information which he had obtained about the treaty of Dover and what related to it. He felt no longer free in the company of that boy, who would henceforth treat with him like an equal. The uncle once more assured the nephew that the amount of the outstanding accounts would be deposited with M. van Zuilichem, who was to stay behind as the Prince's representative; his Highness was then presented to the Queen, who coldly bade him farewell, and afterwards to the Duchess of Portsmouth and to Lady Castlemaine. It was as if the Prince had by this time left off all the manners of a gentleman again, although, on this occasion, his language, at all events, had been worthy of his high birth and dignity. He was almost dreaming when he passed the two ladies, and with a slight bow he proceeded along the double row, followed by the Dutch gentlemen. Finally, after a formal embrace from his Majesty, he was entrusted to the care of Buckingham, who accompanied his Highness as far as the gate.

Charles had followed Buckingham with melancholy eyes, and a frown on his brow. His Majesty went

through the rows until he reached the spot where Sir Henry was standing with a piece of paper in his hand. As he had taken his place, however, in one of the back rows he reached with his arm over all the others, and cried, in a tolerably loud voice, "Your Majesty, allow me one single word. Just let me pass, I say; I want to speak with my King," cried he to his neighbours, whilst he roughly pushed them aside.

"Who are you?" asked the King, somewhat rudely.

"I am a soldier of your Majesty's father, of the blessed martyr—God have mercy upon his soul! I have been shamefully treated by your Majesty's servants, and I demand justice from my King, for it is not your Majesty's fault, but that of others. First of all the Chancellor's, but then he got his desert."

"Who are you, man? What is your name?"

"I am Sir Henry Digby, of Hallam Castle, and these are my complaints drawn up in black and white by my chaplain——"

"Oh, very well. You must try to find me at a more favourable time, Sir Frederick Digby, of—Crossby Castle. I have no more forgotten your services than those of your son. I will never cease to think of you; but I have no time just now."

He went along, and did not notice that the tears stood in the baronet's eyes, that his knees tottered, and that his fist was clenched. His Majesty could not hear the uncouth oath that escaped those firmly compressed lips, nor see how the angry and disappointed old man on the threshold of the royal palace tore up his bill of complaints, and scattered the fragments to the wind.

His Majesty had more important business before

him. He had to announce to the whole Court assembled that he had been pleased to raise Lady Castlemaine to be the Duchess of Cleveland. Buckingham, who had just returned to the reception-room, could hardly believe his ears.

He came nearer to Louise, who could not help noticing his pale, quivering lips, but her smile remained as much a secret to him as her words: "it is always very warm just before a thunderstorm."

The whole Court was pressing round the happy Duchess, who received all those congratulations and protestations of attachment with patronizing kindness. Suddenly a loud shriek was heard; the ladies nearest to the throne ran to the assistance of the Queen, who was fainting. This incident put an end to the reception; but the chief part of the business had been transacted. His Majesty, observing formalities on this occasion, accompanied the ladies, and carried the Queen away, whilst the two duchesses withdrew with Buckingham.

"How do you like your new title, Duchess of Cleveland?"

"Exceedingly; if it were only for this reason, that it brings me nearer to her Grace of Portsmouth."

"His Majesty granted my request to offer you a title, and to me was left the honour of selecting the name."

The Duchess of Cleveland trembled and frowned. Half her satisfaction was gone; but the Duchess of Portsmouth was delicate or clever enough immediately to change the topic of conversation. She regretted the accident that had befallen her Majesty, and concluded with the remark, "that the new title might

have something to do with it. I do not doubt, however, that by to-morrow her Majesty will be entirely reconciled to the great event—of that I can assure your Grace of Cleveland."

The trio had reached the apartments of Lady Castlemaine that was. The Duchess of Portsmouth and Buckingham were reluctantly asked to come in, although her Grace of Cleveland would rather have been the hostess of neither. To her utter surprise, the first thing that drew her attention was a letter in old Rowley's own handwriting; very anxious about the contents, she opened it, and read . . . . . Her eyes became glazed, the paper dropped from her fingers; for the letter contained Charles's parting words, spoken in their mutual interest and in a friendly way, as far as he was concerned: he would continue to remember her in friendship, and hoped she would look upon her future stay at the French Court as the best proof of the great affection which he bore to his royal cousin."

She made violent efforts to smile as she read the letter, well knowing that the looks of both Louise and Buckingham were fixed upon her; she endeavoured to utter even the words, "Kind old Rowley;" but finally she fell down upon a seat. The humiliation was the keener after the triumph that had preceded it.

"You have been my avenger, Louise! *Tout à vous,*" whispered Buckingham, as he left with the Duchess of Portsmouth.

There was a strange smile upon her lips as she nodded to him, and replied, "I rely upon you," and then hurried to the apartments of the Queen.

"That playful child," murmured Buckingham, as he returned to his palace, in a happier mood than he

had known of late, "that plump Duchess of Cleveland! won't she be a treat to Louis and to his Court! Really it is a masterpiece!"

But his happy disposition was not to last. After a few minutes, he received a visit from Lord Arlington, who requested his Grace, in the name of his Majesty, very politely, but urgently, to go and pass some time abroad, there to escape the storm that threatened him at home. "It was a step," added his lordship, "which his Majesty had reluctantly taken, but his Grace must submit to it."

"When I return . . . !" stammered Villiers, as soon as he was alone. "Venomous reptile!" cried he, stamping his foot; "that I shall never forget, Louise de Quérouaille."

Had she been present she would have twitted his Grace by saying, "that she did not wish him ever to forget the lesson he had received."

The Duchess of Cleveland left for France, and so did his Grace of Buckingham.

Nothing but an accident prevented the two from going by the same vessel. The former never returned, and the latter when he came back, after a couple of months, continued to be very submissive to the Duchess of Portsmouth.

Henceforth the English Court knew but one patroness, and the profligate King of England only one mistress. If he had been allowed to choose between Barbara Palmer and Louise de Quérouaille he would have kept the former. Charles Stuart, a disgrace to royalty, the curse of a people whom he was to humiliate and dishonour for fourteen years more, was to be chained for the rest of his life-time to that lesser fa-

vourite; in the firm grasp of her slender fingers was he to go wherever she would lead him. Charles Stuart! your sins were manifold, but very severe was your punishment!

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The Prince of Orange left Cockpit House on the twenty-fifth of February, 1671, accompanied by Messieurs Brederode, van Opdam, van Zuylestein, van Gent, van Valkenburg and many other noblemen of whom the Republic of those days might well be proud. He was attended by the Earl of Ossory and four of the royal yachts with the most illustrious nobles on board. The cannon roared from the walls of the Tower, the crowd shouted and cheered as it had done at his arrival, and when finally every nobleman bowed his most graceful parting bow, his Highness was more affable, more courteous than he had shown himself in landing.

What had his Highness gained? Very little apparently. Whether the money which was owing to him from his uncle would ever find its way into his coffers was very doubtful indeed, but more than gold and silver did he carry away with him. As he did so often in after life, he turned into advantage, almost into a victory, the defeat which he had sustained. He had become better acquainted with the English Court than any of the lords of the "high and mighty States." He had prepared for his second visit, for his marriage with the daughter of the Duke of York, by which he was to become the nearest heir to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland.

CHAPTER XII.

DRAWING TO A CLOSE.

LADY DIGBY had passed quiet days at Hallam ever since her husband's departure. Nothing but her numerous household occupations could have given her any solace or diversion, and, as if she were of opinion that what was agreeable and beneficial to herself should naturally be so to others, she had stimulated all the servants to do almost double work. The storm of anxiety raised in the mother's breast had gradually subsided, the voice of family pride had stifled that of nature, and once more she had brought herself to believe, as firmly as ever, in the excellence of the Digbys and in the perfection of the Mortons. Yet it was well that Sir Henry should convince himself of the state of affairs with his own eyes; for Charles, however promising a lad, was hardly more than an infant by law, and he might not always have been able to resist the temptation of his bad associates in London. The firm conviction dwelt at the bottom of her heart that Sir Henry alone would never be able to settle Charles's affairs if at all intricate, or requiring patience and a clear head, and when she thought of that she wished herself by his side. On the other hand, more especially after her husband's departure and a little calm

reflection, she had eased her mind by thinking that, after all, matters had been very much coloured by John, who could not help looking at them with an eye of rustic ignorance. At the same time she had taken advantage of the absence of her lord to introduce certain novelties, against which Sir Henry, however obsequious and indulgent to her in every other respect, had struggled to the last. Thus one part of the garden, set apart by Dickens for the culture of bulbs and other choice vegetations, had been turned into more useful and productive soil. The vicar of the parish was informed that the morning service was to begin earlier, and to be cut short altogether, and to the tenants it was intimated that my lady would look upon it as a want of respect towards the lady of the manor, if they were to attend the common alehouses and spend their Sundays in sinful and silly games. Those who would not put up with this would have to mind that the rent was always regularly paid to the steward, or else the squire would soon show them that he did not wish to have his interests neglected. It had been a duty devolving upon her in Sir Henry's absence, to renew certain leases and to let a few cottages that were untenanted, and she had taken good care to increase the rent in both cases, in spite of the strong and pertinent objections raised by the parties interested. When the cold weather had set in she had been assailed with a host of petitions for repairs to windows and doors, to kitchens and cellars; such requests were generally met by Sir Henry, first with a storm of oaths and curses upon the respective heads of the petitioners, but finally and invariably with his consent; her ladyship received them all with flat

denial; "if their places were really in such a bad condition they would know best themselves how to set to work." By all these and similar contrivances the industrious housewife might have saved her husband many a shilling, had it not been that all these savings were again spent in soups, and eggs, and old port, which she was in the habit of sending to poor young mothers of the parish, who would not have dared to ask for anything either for themselves or for their babies. Such marks of her ladyship's charity fell only to the share of a very few penniless cottagers, and were always accompanied by the intimation that as they were already unhappy enough in their state of destitution, they had no occasion to increase their misfortune by telling everybody that they had received relief. Thus the voices that blessed Lady Digby were few and low, whereas those that cursed her and wished for Sir Henry's return were many and loud.

As the rule of her strong arm was felt outside, so it was even more within the precincts of the castle. As early as seven o'clock in the morning the under-gardener had to pull the heavy metal bell to rouse the women servants. All of these were to be at work by eight o'clock, when they must have eaten and drunk sufficiently to work upon for six long hours. Rooms that had never been dusted since the martyrdom of Charles the first were now turned upside down, as well as the dust-and-cobweb-hole, as my lady was pleased to call the chaplain's library. It may be remarked, by the way, that the latter suffered not a little injury by this hasty cleaning process; the "Seven Champions of Christendom" and the "Book of Martyrs" underwent such a dusting and scrubbing and rubbing that the

calf covers and soiled title-pages could not bear it any longer, and reluctantly separated from the mother stem. Everybody inside and outside the hall was in a state of utter despair; from the steward down to the lowest hind, all kept their looks constantly fixed upon the south, whence Sir Henry would at last come to their rescue.

The good old baronet knew better how to handle a gun than to hold a quill; he was a better hand at swearing than at composition. However, the chaplain, whose stiff and bony fingers were still good enough to wield the pen, had been commissioned to report progress to her ladyship. The reverend gentleman had first drawn up a short narrative of their journey to London, but that he had been obliged to tear up, since it was Sir Henry's will that he should give a detailed description, whereby the scribe himself did not exactly appear in the most favourable light. After that he had been made to describe Charles's position in London, adding, at the express command of his master, that he, Sir Henry, looked upon himself as an old ass for ever having credited such vile and slanderous reports. My lady had read these letters over and over again as soon as her daily work was over, and she had withdrawn to Sir Henry's vacant seat, now moved a little closer to the fire.

Once on a bright winter's day—it was about the middle of February—Lady Digby had suddenly ordered the mare to be saddled, and another horse for the groom that was to accompany her. She called on Lord Nugent and on his daughter Bessie, "to whom Charles had desired to be remembered; the young gentleman would soon be home to present his respects to the

young lady of his choice." His Lordship bowed; "he was glad to hear that Charles was out of prison." At these words Lady Digby felt rather piqued, until my lord continued: "That he valued too much an alliance with the Digby family not to overlook a few youthful pranks in a young scion of nobility, if it was nothing more."

"If it was nothing more!" These words re-echoed in my lady's ear as she returned to the castle; these words, it seemed, she could not forget. On her arrival there was another letter awaiting her in Sir Henry's own handwriting, and this time with a few words from Charles. It became obvious from both that there *was* something else, something more. In spite of the Dutchman's prayer not to write to my lady about what had happened between the two young people, but to make her acquainted with everything by word of mouth, or, if he did not like that, to commission the chaplain to do so, the old man's resolution had not been shaken: he would rather broach the subject from a distance, and he wished to do so himself, as it was about family matters. That which he had hitherto concealed from her was this time launched at once: the mortgaging of Hallam for the sake of paying Charles's debts. My lady dropped the letter from her hand, and looked fixedly before her. Her life had been one long struggle, a life of care and anxiety to keep out the state of genteel poverty which had been lurking for so many years at the gates of the castle, and which had only of late begun to withdraw. All her care, all her struggles, had been in vain, and were to begin anew, but the former energy was partly gone, for she was young no longer. Still she had not lost all her

fortitude. She was determined to renew the struggle; economy should grow into avarice, and parsimony was to become privation of every luxury. She was determined to show that she could do what she would. What grieved her infinitely more than her dark future was the idea that her son Charles had allowed himself to incur debts, well knowing that he would be unable to meet them. This lowered him considerably in her estimation, and this prepared her, in a manner, for what the letter of Sir Henry had still in store.

"Lucy," thus wrote he in a postscript, which my lady had to read several times before she understood it at all,—"Lucy, no eel could ever have worked itself more blindly into the fisherman's net than our confounded young scamp had got himself into difficulties. One woman was running after him, and he was after another, until the third proved the genuine one. Although she is a girl of low birth, I am rather inclined to believe that through some freak of nature she is destined to be a lady, and Charles loves her as we first loved each other. I certainly did not like it, but the boy spoke so boldly, and she was as proud as a Morton would have been; for my own part, I should have marched them to church at once, but for herself; she wanted Lady Digby to be present. You had better settle matters quietly with Bessie, although it's a burning shame that we should lose her acres. On the other hand, we need not be hard upon our boy, for not one of the daughters of our rich neighbours would have him now that we are poor,—now that we are poor, remember that, Lucy. We shall have to do with a few servants less, and not drink so much beer. I am very sorry for you, Lucy, who have known better

days, but I believe that Mary will easily bear it. I start to-morrow, and will thank God if I find myself in Hallam again. This is indeed a slough of all iniquity. The King would not have been worth a tinker's curse if he had not sent Buckingham to the Continent. I dare bet a pound—one only, Lucy, formerly I should not have minded ten—that his Majesty has outlawed him just to please me and to redress my wrong. Good-bye, Lucy; try to break it to Bessie as well as you can, and think of Charles. Good-bye, Lucy, you may depend upon it that Mary will make herself useful. Don't despair, Lucy!" Quite at the bottom he had scribbled with the utmost difficulty, "You must have found out, of course, that I am referring to Mary Hollis. Good-bye, Lu." That was all the paper could hold. It was as if Sir Henry was afraid that my lady would not be quite pleased with the match, afraid of the scene that was to ensue. Dickens seemed to be of the same opinion, for it was only by appealing to his master's self-love that he had obtained Sir Henry's consent to Charles's union with Mary; the head of the family should, on all important occasions, maintain his paternal authority. Everything, in fact, would have depended upon Mary; but she was not to be shaken in her resolution. Not only Sir Henry, but Lady Digby as well, would have to give her consent, and when Dickens once imprudently let out that she never would do so, Mary answered, "that that was the very reason why she did not wish to be smuggled into Hallam Castle." But there was another cause for her refusing to consent to Charles's urgent request. She still dreaded that he mistook for love what really was gratitude, and how

deeply wretched would she have been, had he found out his mistake after their union.

But to return to my lady, who was sitting on a chair in the middle of the chilly hall, still looking before her and biting her thin lips almost to bleeding. She was far from understanding Mary's noble heart, far from suspecting any self-denial where she saw merely manœuvring and calculation.

Should a common country wench, the offspring of a ranting Roundhead, sit down to the family table as her equal? No, never. She did not conceal from herself that she foresaw a dreadful struggle, that everybody would conspire against her—her weak-minded lord in the front ranks—but she meant to persevere. That was a greater calamity than poverty, and therefore she withdrew to the ancestral hall, knelt down before the portraits of her forefathers, and prayed that no such disgrace might befal the ancestors of the family.

Three days had elapsed since the arrival of the fatal news, and on the evening of the fourth the steward entered without knocking, informing her ladyship with a beaming face, that something had appeared at a distance, which resembled Sir Henry and his party. One riding in front seemed to have a young woman with him in the saddle.

"Very well, steward," said my lady, abruptly; "as they approach you will see closer and better."

Indeed after a little while the horses could be heard trampling in the yard, and shouts of joy were raised such as had not been heard for weeks. "The merry, busy master had returned, and my lady's reign of terror had come to an end." Thus thought every one

of the inmates as he shouted his heartiest cheer. But there was not a single smile on the master's lips, not a single kind greeting came out of his mouth: there was a cloud hanging over his forehead, as well as over that of the young squire, who arrived half an hour after his father, having had to take leave of Mary, whom he had entrusted to the care of the Dutchman. Neither the father nor the son was at all easy about the scene that both expected would follow. But their respective characters showed themselves in the way in which they prepared to meet their fate.

"How do you do, Lucy? how are you, wife?" cried Sir Henry, at a distance, whilst he had taken care to keep the chaplain by his side.

My lady ceremoniously grasped his hand; she bade him welcome, "although she might have wished to see him return under different circumstances." Sir Henry did not ask what she meant, and inquired after what had happened in his absence.

In the midst of these inquiries Charles entered the room. My lady started to her feet; she would have embraced him, had she followed the promptings of her mother's heart, but she restrained herself, she did her best to stare at him fixedly, and answered his greeting stiffly and coldly.

"What is the matter, mother? I suppose father has already told you what he has been obliged to sacrifice for me. I am sorry, mother, that it should have thus happened, but I have come back with the intention of working, and thus paying off the debt that weighs so heavily upon me. What is the matter, mother? Speak!"

"Mr. King, would you not like to have a look at

your library?" asked my lady, and the reverend gentleman, who perfectly understood the gentle hint, went out of the room immediately.

"You ask what is the matter with me? You need not ask that. You intend to make good what you have done? but that can only be by a complete change in your ways, Charles."

"That change has taken place already, Lucy; does not he look a perfect gentleman? Of course it has cost us a good deal of money; but then we shall get over that as I wrote to you. I suppose you have had my letter?"

"Yes, I have read and understood your letter, Sir Henry! We are poor, but we have still our name and our honour! You have acted as I should have wished you to do. Our son has gone wrong, but those are the aberrations of a gentleman. Now that he has come to a stand, we hope that he will the better fulfil his duties towards his parents."

"I hope, mother, that I have never lost sight of those; I have proved it in allowing myself, for years, to be treated like a child, although I was more than that."

She looked angrily at him, at her son now grown into manhood, who would have roused her pride had she been less under the influence of a growing suspicion and vexation. Charles had indeed paid for his London life with his healthy Hallam complexion, but still he looked more of a man than when he left for the metropolis; and what his features indicated was now fully confirmed by his speech. My lady was very much afraid that the horse, which she imagined had been brought to a stand, was only just beginning to run, and would not

be bridled by a woman's hand. The fear of this inspired her with a certain caution, but not in any way with indulgence and gentleness.

"I never doubted that you entertained a very favourable opinion of yourself," said my lady, in answer to Charles's concluding words. She then turned to Sir Henry, as she could not govern her passion any longer.

"I hope, Sir Henry, that the head of the Digbys will look upon the whim of his heir as a passing one, just as I do. The acquaintance of licentious women lowers the taste; the healthy air of Hallam, and a visit to Lord Nugent, are safe to remove the impressions gathered in London."

"My lady!" cried Charles passionately, "it is not you who should blame me for those acquaintances. I have already confessed to my aberrations. I had therefore expected that you would have met me in a different spirit; I had hoped that you would have spared me the words which I am now about to speak: a different education would have saved me from those *liaisons* with licentious women—a different education would have allowed me to find here what I have sought elsewhere, and what, after all my wanderings, I have found at last. Yes, found at last, mother!" cried he, with increasing passion, as he perceived the scornful look on her countenance. "Mary Hollis is to be my bride. The head of our family has approved of my choice. Show yourself my mother for once by desiring nothing but my happiness."

"Then I have never shown myself your mother yet?" replied my lady, with a slightly trembling voice; but she had soon conquered her emotion, and

continued as coldly as before: "I know your mother's duty towards you. Sir Henry cannot have given his consent. We have all to respect his wishes; but it can never be his desire that the Digby family should voluntarily renounce the last thing they have left. Or, do you wish that, sir?"

"Of course not—upon my soul not. But, Lucy, you are talking as gravely as a judge. Strip yourself of your dignity for once, and allow me time to rejoice in my return. The rest will get all right. Charles, my lad, you are scarcely out of the saddle, and you are talking again of your sweetheart. Allow your mother a few days' time, to think the matter over."

"I need not think the matter over at all, Sir Henry."

"I am not going to see Lord Nugent. Mother, it is an angel whom I wish to make your daughter-in-law. Oh, you do not know her—do learn, mother, to know and to love her!"

"I will see her to-morrow." This my lady said in such an icy tone that Charles did not know whether he had any cause to regret or to applaud his mother's resolution. He was about to enlighten himself on that point, when the chaplain rushed into the room with a few detached leaves in one hand and a calf-cover in the other.

"Sir! sir! look here, sir! That's all that I have found of the 'Seven Champions,' sir!" The poor old man was almost choking with grief.

"Are you mad," asked Sir Henry, "to trouble me with such a heap of rags?"

"Rags, sir! yes, but they were not rags. Oh, if I knew whose doing that is."

"I did it, Mr. King," cried my lady; "I had your dust-bin cleaned, and you may be thankful that I allowed you to keep them."

"The only thing I had," stammered the chaplain. "God grant——"

"What, Mr. King?"

"That you will never be done to as your ladyship does towards others. It seems impossible for my lady to conceive that other people can love anything."

"That will do, Mr. King. Have you too come from London with new-fangled notions of independence? or have you all entered into a conspiracy to turn Hallam upside down? You can go, Mr. King; you shall be called when we require your services."

Charles followed the chaplain as he left the room, and endeavoured to comfort the poor old soul by the solemn promise that he would get him another and better copy of his favourite work. "My lady does not mean any harm, my good friend," said Charles, who sympathized inwardly with the chaplain, grieved and injured as he was by his own mother, whom the son felt it a duty to defend before others.

The rest of the evening was passed in painful silence. Sir Henry endeavoured more than once to cheer the doleful countenances, but he was obliged at last to desist, and to confess that it is *not always* pleasant to return to one's household gods.

On the following morning my lady reminded her son that she wished to see Miss Hollis. Mary was staying with the faithful Dutchman, by whom she had been received with open arms, as well as by his wife and by mother Ann. When Charles conveyed his mother's message the older women could not conceal

their joyful expectation. Only Dickens shook his head, and Mary was silent for some time. "My dear Charles," said she at last, "I hope you will not suspect me of sinful pride, but I may not go to see your mother. If my lady had given her consent I should not have hesitated for a moment, but now, Charles, I should have the appearance of begging for that which must voluntarily be acceded to me. I am not your equal; you know that, Charles dear!"

In spite of Charles's arguments she resisted, gently but firmly, and the poor youth had to return to the castle with tardy steps and beating heart. How great was his surprise and his satisfaction to hear from his mother's lips that the girl was right, and that she would go and see her under his escort. Not a single harsh word came this time from her lips.

The house of Dickens could boast now of an honour which had never been conferred upon it before. My lady crossed the Dutchman's threshold *in propria persona*. However, Dickens was not there to show how flattered he felt. Only his wife and mother Ann received her at the door. Her ladyship passed the two women with a slight nod of the head, and went directly up to Mary. The latter had risen as her ladyship entered the room, and scrutinized the visitor with her clear intelligent eye.

"Dearest mother, that is my Mary," said Charles, taking the maiden's hand to present her to Lady Digby.

"I know her," was the curt reply. "Have not you been at the castle once? I remember how you then already spoke as if you were at home. I suppose the plan was ripening at that time to get into the place to which you are now aspiring?"

"My lady!" said Mary, in a stifled voice.

"You are a clever child, and know how to take advantage of every thing, of the Duke of Buckingham as well as of his Majesty. You aspired to the very highest. But still you found it more advisable in the end to descend a few steps from the throne of your ambition to look out for somebody lower that would be pleased to give you a name."

"Mother, not another word! Was that why you came here? Mother, you do not know Mary."

"Let my lady speak, Charles," said Mary. Her quivering lips had turned quite pale; she trembled in all her limbs, but she had never for a moment ceased to look my lady in the face. "I will listen patiently, because it is your mother speaking. You have come here, my lady, with intent to crush me, but that you will find very difficult, for I intend to bow before you. If you have any more charges against me, my lady, I will listen and be silent."

My lady was for a moment petrified by so much gentleness and so much energy. The manner might show the former, but the act testified to the latter. That child kept looking at her, kept silent, and my lady felt that this silence was more eloquent than any flow of words. It was that which increased her anger; which made her even use words that, in calmer moments, she would have disapproved herself; and which caused her to utter as she went away the repeated declaration that she would never comply with the whim of her son, that she would never acknowledge Mary as her daughter-in-law.

"And I shall never bear that name unless it be with your own free consent," said Mary. "I demand

a place in your heart, my lady, and not merely one at the family table."

"Never!"

That was my lady's farewell. She went away, after having beckoned Charles to go before her, a hint which he was very unwilling to take, and which he would not have obeyed at all, if Mary had not begged him to do so.

"She is your mother, Charles!" whispered the girl, but still audibly enough for my lady to hear it. It did the mother's heart good to hear those words; it compelled her—for however harsh and cold apparently, she knew how to appreciate moral grandeur in her fellow-creatures—it compelled her ladyship to respect that child; and so completed her defeat, where she had expected to come off triumphant. Whereas it had been her design to put a stop to that ridiculous connexion between the two young people by humbling the girl so deeply that Charles would see how much she was beneath him, and that Mary herself would desist from continuing the intrigue any longer. And now that child had been the greater, had been superior to herself. Had she been willing to confess, or able to conceive, that a fine-minded maiden like Mary, when once loved and appreciated by a man, may inspire him with feelings that are unquenchable, how much grief she might have spared herself and others! Now even her only child turned away from her; he did not reproach her with anything, he did not openly rebel against her, but he remained cold at every friendly word that she was ready to speak in so many a moment when her heart melted down to that of a loving mother. Sir Henry was

always resisted with violence, but Charles's disobedience to his mother was more passive than active.

Months had thus elapsed. The blossoms of spring had long gone by, nay the ripe autumn fruit was already hidden underneath the dark green foliage. Sir Henry was in the habit of escaping from the oppressive atmosphere of his own house as much as he could, indemnifying himself for his restraint at home by making free with the farmers outside. Charles would rove day by day across the heath. Even if Mary had not stated it so distinctly, his own feelings would have told him that the intimacy between them must cease with the continued hostility of his parents. The young man was secretly repining and rebelling, and consumed by his grief. At last, after a very long struggle, the idea that had engaged his mind for so many weeks seemed to have come to maturity.

On a fine autumnal night he went to the Dutchman's dwelling-place, where he found Mary sitting under a large chestnut-tree by the side of Alice Kennedy, the happy wife of the over-happy John.

The young couple had rented a cottage in the neighbourhood of their father's house, and my lady had been the first to hand her savings to Dickens to be given to the happy young couple. She had been the first to select the cottage. When Dickens had betrayed his amazement, and ventured upon one of those remarks, for which he alone had the courage, she had answered, "that she was always glad to see equals united to equals, and that she could perfectly enter into the pleasant feelings of himself and his wife." Mary found in her new neighbour a friend who treated her with kindness intermingled with respect. She

would often sit with the young wife under the large chestnut-tree, to talk about Alice's happiness, although the latter had never courage enough to speak of hers. Once as they were discussing their usual topic, Charles stepped suddenly forward, saying that he wished to speak to Mary.

"Let us walk together, as we used to do," said he, when he saw that she was still wavering. She rose, and went with him.

It was not he, but she, that began the conversation. She too had taken counsel with herself and with her Heavenly Father, and made up her mind to go away from Hallam. "That will lighten your heavy burden, my dear friend," she concluded, with a painful smile.

He suddenly stopped, grasped her hand, and looked into her loving eye. "Yes, Mary, you do love me! I am more than convinced of it. Let us go to York, and be married at once. We have borne her tyranny long enough, and my father really wishes it."

"No, Charles, I cannot act otherwise; I may not stealthily enter your family; your mother must receive me of her own accord."

"I expected to hear that from you, but listen now to what I am going to do. Not you, but I, shall leave here. I go away to-night, and enlist in one of the Dutch regiments; there I shall gain a name for myself, and when once I possess that, then, Mary, you will surely not refuse to accept it?"

"Oh, Charles! you would give up the noble name which you now bear, and that for my sake? I thank you, Charles!" cried she, in ecstasy, as she clung round his neck, and kissed him. "That is my fare-

well," whispered she, with a slight blush, "but a farewell different from what you imagine. I do not accept your sacrifice, Charles. You have a father and a mother, and you may be the support of their old age, whereas I am an orphan, leaving no one behind but you. You will not despair, you will be patient, for the faithful can abide their time; I shall go away from here, but do you stay. It would be too cruel to leave your aged mother at the very time that she will really become your mother again, for that she will when I am gone."

Charles persisted; he had made up his mind to go that very evening; here he could not remain any longer, for he felt his hatred towards his mother grow and grow every second.

"May the Lord God forgive you such dreadful words," said she, shuddering; "now I feel that you must go."

It was almost dark when they parted, but it was a parting hardly deserving of that name, for both continued to look round and to turn back, in order to part once more. The tears trickled down their cheeks, and amidst sobs and feelings of agony, the final farewell was stammered at last.

Dickens, who was just returning from his hard day's work, observed them from a distance, and guessed what was going on. The kind fellow forgot his own happiness, and stamped with his wooden shoes before the door of his cottage. "The pike eats the roach," murmured he, "but where's the other to devour the pike?"

That day had been marked by oppressive heat. The labourers, tired of their daily toil, were returning homewards to their wives and children, humming their

merry ditties in expectation of the enjoyment of their day's rest. Mary, who had not gone much further yet than the spot where she had kissed Charles farewell, gazed with her tearful eyes upon the beautiful landscape around her; here and there were slight indications of the decline of autumn, and the sublimity of the whole was enhanced by a thick veil which the gathering livid-hued clouds spread over wood and heath. "Father, Father!" she exclaimed, in a gentle whisper, but, after a few moments' reflection, she added with great firmness of mind,—"No, it cannot be otherwise; God will be my guiding star."

"Mary, Mary," cried Dickens, "where are you, child? There is a thunderstorm coming; but that is good, too; it has been threatening for a long while, and the air will be more refreshing afterwards."

Mary nodded, as if it were necessary to confirm his words, and entered the cottage of her Dutch friend. A few minutes later, however, she stole away again, wrapped up in a cloak, which, however thick and heavy, was not rainproof. She went straight from the cottage to the castle, and there asked, in a scarcely audible voice, to be allowed to speak to my lady in private. The latter was engaged in checking, with the chaplain, the number of bushels of rye and wheat that had been brought that day into the barns. Amidst her labour alone could she forget the news which had reached her that morning from Lord Nugent, and which she had hitherto concealed from everybody, the news that his Lordship's daughter was betrothed to another man. The event had been communicated in a short and barely civil note. Her last hope was gone; she stood alone, isolated from her family with her notions

and expectations of the honour and glory of the Digbys, and their house was poor and scorned by their neighbour, poor and divided within! But yet that proud head was not to be bent, that stern eye betrayed no tears, that wounded heart did not look for consolation, not for any one at least to share the burden of her grief; she never spoke a word, and buried her grief within her own bosom.

The steward came to inform my lady that Miss Hollis wished to speak to her. Her eye flashed with indignation, her pale and thin lips trembled as the name was uttered of her who was the cause of all her trouble. At the first impulse of her feelings she wished to send her away, but upon second thoughts she deemed it wiser to receive the maiden. Mary faced her once more. It was evident that she too had been suffering, she too had grown thinner, but her suffering had brought an air of gentle melancholy upon her features quite different from my lady's. Once more the harsh words died on her ladyship's lips, and she merely asked, coldly, "What is it you want?"

"I want to spare you great trouble, my lady! Charles contemplates going away——not with me," added she, as she noticed the expression of contempt on that proud countenance. "He wishes to go abroad, there to win a name for himself; do not let him go, my lady, I beseech you."

"And it's you that have come to advise me on that point! I understand why I should not let him go. You cannot do without him, you do not wish to lose your influence over him. He might learn to forget abroad who she is that has made him so happy here! And you, the child that has sown the seed of disaffection

between mother and son, you who have caused him to rebel against the parental authority, you come here to inform me of his intention? You come to beg me to abet in making you still longer the curse of this afflicted family? Get you gone, mischievous wench!"

"Do not speak thus, my lady!" replied she, with emotion. "It is not for my sake that I wish to keep Charles here. He shall not see me again, for I am about to leave this neighbourhood altogether. Pray, my lady, do not delay any longer; he intends to leave here this very evening, and without saying anything. Never tell him that it was I who revealed his secret; never, my lady, I beseech you," added she, with a sigh.

"But what are your plans? Why do *you* wish to go, and for *him* to remain here?"

"Because he belongs to his parents, and also, my lady, because I will be no longer the curse of this family, the one that severs the mother from the son."

"Mary!" That was the sudden outcry of the mother's heart so long restrained; it was at once a cry of gratitude and of repentance.

"Farewell! farewell!" whispered the girl, who was dying under her grief, and longing to make the sacrifice required. "Farewell! farewell! God bless your old age! God bless your whole family!"

She hurried away; she ran along the dark road, and heeded not the flashes of lightning, the pelting rain, or the roaring thunderbolts. She cautiously lifted the latch of the door, and ascended the stairs that led to her humble garret. There she fell down upon her knees. She endeavoured to pray, and she did pray, but in tears instead of words; the few broken syllables

she could utter were silenced by the rolling thunder that cleared the oppressive atmosphere outside. How long she remained there she could never have told, when she was called up from her stupor by a confused sound of voices all shouting her name through the house. The door of her little garret was suddenly burst open, and as the candlelight fell upon the whitewashed walls, she observed on the threshold Charles and Lady Digby, and behind them old Sir Henry, who, stepping forward to embrace her, cried, in his loudest voice, "Mary, my child, my daughter!"

Mary felt that she was embraced, that she was kissed, but—nothing more.

On the following morning when the sky had reassumed its wonted blue, when the sun darted his still genial beams upon the drenched soil, and the whole feathered creation was singing its morning hymn, how happy did she feel in Charles's arms opposite Sir Henry, who was almost giddy with delight, opposite King, who wiped the tears away with his lanky fingers, and by the side of my lady, who, it is true, did not call her such tender names as she had done the night before, but was watching her son with a loving mother's eye, as she whispered over him, "Mary, make him happy."

Everything seemed to indicate a new life. Sir Henry had recovered his former cheerfulness, Charles was soon restored to life and youth and energy, and Robert King regained his wonted quietude of mind in the newly cleaned library, with his new copy of "the Seven Champions." Charles, united to Mary Hollis at last, laboured and toiled with the Dickenses, father and son, so that they might not only remain the owners

of land and castle, but also free it from the heavy burden that was still pressing upon them. As for my lady, she fulfilled her household duties with the same energy as before. Age did not seem to affect her in any way, nor would she ever allow Mary to take her place. The latter might work, but only under her guidance and supervision. It was not until after a couple of months that Mary became fully aware of what was still going on in that proud heart, fully conscious of the heavy struggle that must have been raging within her. One day that Mary accidentally entered her ladyship's bedchamber, she noticed that the family portraits were hung with crape. All her mother's love had been unable to extinguish her family pride.

Mary understood that, but said nothing. She passed on with a gentle smile, which might have enabled the most casual observer to guess her passing thought. So no doubt did my lady when she frowned on seeing Mary in the hallowed place.

A few months more had elapsed when my lady exclaimed in her loudest voice from Mary's bedchamber to Sir Henry, and Mr. King, who stood outside, "It's a boy, Sir Henry, it's a boy." On this occasion Lady Digby kissed the young mother with a tenderness she had only shown once before, and whispered gently into her ear, "Now you may see the portraits, Mary!"

We may be permitted to have a last glance at the interesting group. Years have passed and left their mark on all the Hallam circle. Mother Ann has died in the Lord, and is buried by the side of her brother and protector Jacob Hollis, whose body had been

claimed by his Dutch friend when the news of his death had reached the cottagers round the Castle. Sir Henry is still the cheerful old man of yore; equally coarse in his mirth as in his moments of excitability, only he cannot stand quite so much beer as formerly, and requires a few more hours' sleep. My lady still walks upright, the mark of authority is stamped upon her brow, gravity is in all her looks, and the sternness of her features is only softened down when she has her eldest grandson on her lap, and plays with him. But, after all, her authority and power are more appearance than reality: unwittingly or tacitly she has abdicated in favour of her daughter—the real lady. The rule of that low-born Mary Hollis was borne even with less complaints than that of proud Lucy Morton, for the sway of the new mistress was one of love. Sir Henry put his tankard down in the evening when Mary stroked his glowing cheek, and asked him with a loving smile whether that nasty beer did not sometimes disturb his sleep. My lady would leave the kitchen when Mary, coaxing her away to the common sitting-room, and, pointing to an easy-chair, told her that a grandmother might have her rest; then too grandmother would sit down, and rest herself. As for Robert King, his legs knew hardly now what they had to do with his body, but if they had been endowed with animated speech they would have pronounced a hymn of praise in honour of Mrs. Digby, who had pensioned them altogether. Robert King went out trout-fishing or bird-catching as he chose; he likewise slept if he chose, and that he did for the most part as if he was desirous to make up for lost time. And Charles! He was no subject, as Sir Henry had been all his life, but yet

submissive to Mary, his wife, to her superior tact and experience. Mrs. Digby herself, now brought into contact with real life, with so many that loved and revered her, had gradually divested herself of her prejudices and sickly notions about God and the world in which she lived; once even, when Charles, after a hard day's labour had kissed her pure unsullied lips, she had gone so far as to confess to him what she had so often said to herself: "How good it has been for us to see life in London."

The mortgage raised on the Hallam estate was almost half paid off, but it was soon to be cleared altogether, sooner than any of them expected.

One evening as the whole of the family were enjoying the rest of the sacred Lord's-day together on the lawn, Sir Henry and my lady never tired of the screaming and laughing grandchildren, although Mary was continually interrupted in her devotional reading, the steward brought a parcel for Mrs. Charles Digby. It had arrived from London late on Saturday evening, and he had found no opportunity to give it to his mistress before. Imagine the general surprise and delight when the parcel, on being opened, proved to contain the title-deeds of Bloomfield house, once the property of Sir Henry's father, but since Cromwell's reign the seat of the hated Robert Stowe, the Nonconformist, who had died a few weeks since. Enclosed with the documents which put Mary in possession of a splendid estate, was a mere scrap of paper, and written upon it with trembling fingers: "*From the dying Maria de Penalva to her whom she has never ceased to bless.*"

"Confound it!" cried Sir Henry, "that is no doubt

from his Majesty, who has not forgotten us after all. Three cheers for the King!"

"Mary," whispered my lady, as she took her daughter's hand, "it is to you that the Digbys owe their greatness."

Charles was the only one permitted to read the last words of the unfortunate friend and companion of a still more unfortunate Queen. Full of emotion he clung round Mary's neck: "God sent you upon earth to be my good genius in everything."

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

EIGHTEEN years have elapsed since the opening of our tale, and we are in the beginning of the winter of 1688. William of Orange, the inexperienced lad with whom we first became acquainted at Whitehall, where he gave abundant cause to suspect what he might at one time become, had surpassed the boldest expectations. He had not succeeded in saving his beloved country from the disastrous war with Louis XIV. and his vassal Charles II., in conjunction with the Elector of Cologne and the Bishop of Munster, but he had stood by the brave little Republic in the hour of danger; he knew that he was the anchor of every Dutchman's hope, the standard round which all political parties were most ready to rally. Not as a general had he been triumphant, but as a statesman. After the dreadful struggle from which the United Provinces had emerged without stain or blemish, he had paid a second visit to Whitehall, but this time as the eminent head of the still powerful Republic. Although he had fought his uncle Charles in battle and in debate with all the means that were in his power, yet he succeeded in wresting from the head of the House of Stuart the hand of the heir-pre-

sumptive of the English throne, of Mary, the eldest daughter of the Duke of York; and thus he triumphed over the numerous Court party who had so long thwarted and resisted the silent, morose, phlegmatic Dutchman. Charles II. died, and was succeeded by his brother James II., who endeavoured to realize as a King the ideal which he strove after when heir-apparent, an ideal pursued by every one of the House of Stuart, and explaining the doom that awaited them all. James II. was more awkward than his brother Charles, but then he was more energetic. He set to work with an iron will at his ideal: absolute monarchy in England and suppression of Protestantism in as far as it was an obstacle in his way.

As long as he merely attacked the liberties of his subjects he still kept up a numerous party in the staunch adherents of the Church of England, for to them the right divine of kings was a dogma as indisputable as that of the Athanasian Creed. Whatever laws he might tread underfoot, the bishops and clergy deemed it unworthy of a Christian people to assail the anointed of the Lord; whilst the liberals of the day, the so-called Whigs, the most intelligent and educated Englishmen, had been so thoroughly defeated, that their voices were like a whisper in the clamorous host of tyranny, prejudice, and stupidity. But at last James went further; he attacked the sacred Church of England, and the same bishops, without yet directly advocating or preaching rebellion, began occasionally to hint at it. Every one now turned his eyes towards William of Orange. At the Hague his Highness received the English emigrants of all parties and denominations, but he always remained

silent; yet he was far from being inactive. He looked about him with his eagle eye, and remained cool and calm while passion raged about him; however pressed on all sides, he continued to abide his time. His time would come; and it did come. But long before he had prepared everything so that he should be ready at the right moment, how many obstacles had he had to conquer or to remove! The expedition which he contemplated required treasures, which he did not possess, but which were granted to him; it demanded troops, which had to be recruited under the very eyes, the Argus eyes, of the French and English Ambassadors, who were incessantly watching every one of his movements, and with the knowledge of the States General, all of whom were far from being trustworthy. At last when the troops were all levied, and the fleet of five hundred vessels ready to sail, the cabinets of Versailles and of St. James were both fully informed of the intended expedition. Admiral Herbert, an English emigrant, was to have the command of the fleet, in order to avoid the slightest appearance of a conquest, which would have been humiliating to a proud nation, although it was anything but agreeable to the hardly less proud Dutchmen of the day to see the cross of St. George unfurled from their masts instead of the Prince's yellow flag, lately substituted for the banner of the States. However, the Prince succeeded also in overcoming this difficulty, and the laurel-crowned Evertsen declared himself willing to receive his orders from the hated and unpopular Englishman.

Glorious was the sight of that forest of masts, as thickly clustered together as ever was borne by the waves, when the fleet was about to leave

the harbour of Helvoetsluys; the pier was heard to crack and groan under the weight of the tramping horses, the air re-echoed with the lusty farewell cheers, and the high functionaries of the Republic had formed a circle round the pale, pock-marked, coughing, but shrewdly calculating man, who seemed to listen to their touching, cordial parting words with the greatest indifference, although his earnest words of gratitude, and his promise to be faithful to the past, were in strong contrast with his appearance.

It is needless in a work of fiction to give a detailed account of all the little incidents and accidents that befel the gigantic fleet before it weighed anchor; to relate how after the storm that scattered the vessels every one despaired of the undertaking with the exception of William, who on leaving was if possible more cheerful, more affable, more confident than ever; to narrate how he prophesied from the incipient adversity his ultimate triumph and success; to describe how he caused the Dutch papers to be crammed with fictitious and exaggerated accounts of the catastrophe, so that James might be lulled asleep; to tell how the fleet covered almost the whole breadth of the Channel, as it grew into seven hundred ships, and how the hopeful crowd gathered along the quay of Dover were gladdened in their hearts at the roaring of the hundredfold salutes and the merry warlike strains that sounded from the distant bands.

There are among the spectators some of our old acquaintances, and these are by no means backward in the manifestations of their joy. Foremost in the crowd is a man just turned forty, in the ordinary dress of the country squire, and by his side is another man, his

servant, and apparently not much older; the one is Charles Digby, Esq., of Bloomfield House, and the other is John Dickens, and behind the two is a handsome lad eagerly looking about him, Henry Digby, the eldest of his father's sons, a boy so handsome that many a lass in the crowd has already made him a subject for discussion. The old baronet, now for these two years a widower, was not too old to ride southward with the others, but the recollection of the martyr King was still too vivid, and his belief in the right divine too strong, to allow him to go and help the usurper, as he already called William of Orange.

His son Charles, however, was of a different opinion. He had no recollection of any other Court than of that of Charles the Second; he had shared the secret wishes of the suspected Whig party, and he had allied himself with some of his country friends to defend the English Church and the British Constitution. Here too Mary's influence upon her husband was unmistakeable. The heads of the Whig party had faithfully informed him of the approaching landing of his Highness, which was to take place either at Torbay or at Dartmouth. As we have seen above, the fleet had already hove in sight at Dover, and the eager spectators could hardly suppress their outcry of encouragement and sympathy, in spite of the spies of Chancellor Jefferies, who surrounded them on all sides.

"They may sail into Torbay to-morrow, John," said Charles, loud enough to be understood; "there is a stiff breeze from the east."

"The wind may change yet," whispered one in the crowd.

"That's what you wish, I presume ?" cried another.

"A Papist, a Jesuit amongst us !" cried several voices, and all rushed towards the imprudent Jacobite, who barely escaped the danger.

Charles and his party rode off that same evening, and the three bold men, galloping as fast as their horses would take them, reached Devonshire in the morning of the third day. When they arrived at Torbay they were expecting the fleet every moment, but nothing, alas! but a few dark spots were visible yet on the horizon, and they disappeared almost immediately. The noblemen assembled along the bay indulged in the most anxious conjectures; they hinted at a possible attack by the royal fleet under the command of the Earl of Bath, they spoke of a scattering of the Dutch vessels, which would not be able to resist the enemy with their ballast of fourteen thousand soldiers. The handful of men assembled at Torbay dispersed from an instinct of self-preservation. Charles alone made up his mind to wait for more reliable information. With a few gentlemen he passed the day in eager expectation and growing anxiety. The wind had turned indeed towards the south, and this had given rise to the weary delay.

Towards evening fall the fishermen descried from the shore the first white sails. It was as if they had all kept themselves concealed until this moment, for our three friends were now suddenly surrounded by a mob who fully seemed to share their expectations. At this juncture John seemed to hold all caution superfluous; from his pocket appeared an orange sash, with the initial W at both ends. This was the signal for loud cheering and applause, and every one pressed round

the courageous man who had first dared to display the colour of the liberator on English soil.

Sail after sail seemed deftly to emerge from the sea, and the view was more imposing if possible than at Dover.

A large frigate approached the coast, and from her mainmast floated a square flag with the arms of the Prince and of his royal consort, surrounded by a Latin inscription to the following effect: "For the Protestant Religion and the Liberties of England," and underneath the motto of the Orange family: "*Je maintiendrai.*" Amidst the trumpet blasts from the frigate, and the lusty cheers of welcome from those on shore, William and his most experienced generals stepped into one of the innumerable boats overcrowded with soldiers and cautiously guided ashore. The shouts here silenced even the warlike strains. Men and women ran up to their waists into the water to meet the welcome liberator with cries of 'God bless you!' He landed, and looked with the greatest affability on those who pressed round him. Instead of the host of English adherents that he expected, there was but a handful to receive him. Yet he did not betray any disappointment, and bowed to the faithful as he passed along. He shook hands with Charles, who was foremost in the crowd, and as he noticed John with the orange sash he fixed his eyes upon both men with a scrutinizing look. "I know that sash; I gave it eighteen years ago to a man who must have been your father, I presume? You too I remember having seen before."

"As a wanton youth at Whitehall, your Highness, when we wasted our time in throwing snowballs."

"Just so. Well, we shall this time play at a

different game, unless God, in His mercy, has ordained it otherwise."

"If it becomes necessary, your Highness, I shall endeavour to hit them harder still, and my faithful servant is likewise at your disposal."

The Prince nodded to both with great affability, and after having watched for some time the disembarking of horses and soldiers, he repaired to a fisherman's cottage, where he spent the night in an armchair. Charles and a few others were not idle during the night. They took care to spread the great news as far as Exeter, they doubled in their reports the strength of the troops and the number of English nobles that had gone over to the Prince. On the following day, after an early morning service in the camp, the host marched on to Exeter. In the beginning the city assumed a hostile attitude, but very soon the aspect of affairs underwent a complete change.

Lord Colchester, the friend of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, who had endeavoured once before what the Prince was destined to carry out, but who had paid for his rash undertaking with his life, Lord Colchester was the first nobleman who openly sided with the invader. This example was followed by Lord Carnbury, with the greater part of the troops under his command, and soon afterwards by Churchill, who was to become the celebrated Duke of Marlborough; likewise by the Duke of Grafton, one of the bastards of Charles the Second. Every one seemed to abandon the King "by right divine," until the defection reached even the steps of the throne. The Prince of Denmark, who had married James's second

daughter, left his father-in-law to join his brother-in-law, and the Princess, the unfortunate monarch's own child, hastened to follow her husband's example. Within a few days the army and the Parliament, the nobility and the Commons, had all rallied round the banner of William of Orange, and the last King of the noble house of Stuart had fled to be the guest of Louis XIV.

The subsidies of France had borne fruit; the work prepared by Charles the Second had been achieved under his brother James. The Stuarts could not profit by experience, so much had become obvious at last to the English nation, and their name was for ever erased from the annals of the people.

Another severe struggle awaited the first constitutional King of Europe, from whose reign dates England's true grandeur. A French army had transported the dethroned King to Ireland, where the old dynasty still found many adherents. At last King William was enabled to send his faithful Dutch troops thither, with the *élite* of the English regiments, and then took place the struggle which decided James's fate. The issue of the battle of the Boyne caused him to fly back to St. Germain, and William remained on the throne of Great Britain and Ireland. It had been a critical day, and many of the English soldiers and nobles had never been in battle before. Such had been the case with Charles Digby and John Dickens at all events. For a long time the chances of war had been wavering. A few regiments were already thrown back, but the plumes waving from the King's helmet, the flash and sparkle of his lively eye, the voice full of force and warlike spirit, reanimated every man's courage.

Once more their energy was roused, and onwards they went over heaps of corpses, sliding along the bloody field, and the eye constantly fixed upon the enemy until he turned his back.

The victory was on the side of order and wisdom. The clarions sounded, the banners floated, the plumes waved. Charles's sword had been stained with blood for the second time, but the spots which it bore now had effaced the blood of Buckingham. Dickens' orange sash had turned crimson. The King stood in the midst of his generals distributing the marks of his gratitude and of his friendship. Here a cordial grasp that reached the swelling heart, there an encouraging look, yonder a few short words never to be forgotten. How different was William the General from William the diplomatist.

Mr. Charles Digby was summoned to the presence of the King, and before the front of the regiment at whose head he had fought with all the strength and energy of a true Digby, he bowed one knee before the King on the damp and slippery ground, and rose as Viscount Hallam of Hallam.

For once a Digby had shown what it was to have political foresight. Sir Henry hinted at that, when, on hearing of Charles's being raised to the peerage, he exclaimed, "Confound it! the usurper has done more for us than all the lawful kings together."

From the early morning until late in the evening King William had not left the saddle, and when at last he would have been able to enjoy a moment's rest, his usual ailment prevented him; he had felt his head ache all day, but had striven not to succumb.

Many similar days were yet in store for him ere he

could enjoy that rest which nature has reserved for every human being. Treason might surround him, ingratitude might wound him, party strife might revile, fever might consume him; but nothing made him flinch in the fulfilment of his mighty task: he was found faithful unto the end.

Glorious are the scrolls of history on which his name is inscribed.

THE END.

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